

Byzantine Women

Varieties of Experience
AD 800–1200

Edited by
Lynda Garland



CENTRE FOR HELLENIC STUDIES, KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

BYZANTINE WOMEN:
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800–1200

Centre For Hellenic Studies
King's College London



Publications 8 **University of London**

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2006 by Ashgate Publishing

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

First issued in paperback 2016

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience, 800–1200. – (Publications for the Centre for Hellenic Studies, King's College London; no. 8)
1. Women – Byzantine Empire – Social conditions. 2. Byzantine Empire – Social life and customs. I. Garland, Lynda, 1955– II. King's College (London, England). Centre for Hellenic Studies
305.4'2'09495'0902

US Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200 / edited by Lynda Garland.
p. cm. – (Publications for the Centre for Hellenic Studies, King's College London; 8)
Includes biographical references and index.
1. Women – Byzantine Empire. 2. Women – History – Middle Ages, 500–1500.
I. Garland, Lynda, 1955–. II. Series: Publications (King's College (University of London). Centre for Hellenic Studies); 8.
HQ1147.B98B98 2007
305.409495'09021–dc2
2006016617

ISBN-13: 978-0-7546-5737-8 (hbk)

ISBN-13: 978-1-138-25951-5 (pbk)

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Abbreviations

AASS	<i>Acta Sanctorum Bollandiana</i> , Brussels, 1643–1779; Paris & Rome, 1866–87; Brussels, 1894–.
AT	Achilles Tatius, <i>Leukippe and Clitophon</i> .
BHG	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca</i> , ed. F. Halkin, edn. 3, Subsidia Hagiographica 8a, Brussels, 1957.
Bib. Marc.	Saint Mark’s Library, Venice
Bib. Nac.	Madrid Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid.
Bib. Nat.	Paris Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
Bib. Vat.	Vatican Library, Rome.
BMGS	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i> .
CFHB	<i>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae</i> .
Char.	Chariton Aphrodisiensis, <i>Chaereas and Kallirhoe</i> .
CSHB	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i> .
DAI	<i>Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De Administrando Imperio</i> , ed. & tr. Gy. Moravcsik & R.J.H. Jenkins, Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, rev. edn. 1967.
DC	Niketas Eugenianos, <i>Drosilla and Charicles</i> .
de cer.	Constantine Porphyrogenitos, <i>De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae</i> , ed. J.J. Reiske, 2 vols, Bonn: CSHB, 1829; partial French translation by A. Vogt, <i>Constantin Porphyrogénète. Le livre des cérémonies</i> , 2 vols, Paris: Budé, 1935–40.
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i> .
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
Hel.	Heliodoros, <i>Aethiopika</i> .
HH	Eustathios Makrembolites, <i>Hysmine and Hysminias</i> .
PG	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne.
RD	Theodore Prodromos, <i>Rodanthe and Dosikles</i> .
V. and A.	Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
Xen.	Xenophon of Ephesus, <i>Ephesiaka</i> .



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Editor's Introduction

Byzantine society was unquestionably patriarchal. Nevertheless, as in all medieval cultures attitudes towards women were ambivalent. It can be argued that women were a marginalized group, in theory an inferior sex, and conventionally were supposed to be seldom seen and never heard in public. They were debarred from all priestly functions and denied the power of giving instruction in church. Nevertheless the church acknowledged that women were spiritually equal to men and there were many well-known early Christian female martyrs. Women founded monasteries, their relics might perform miraculous cures and some achieved sainthood. The Theotokos (the 'Mother of God') was always a central figure in the devotion of both men and women and was seen as the mediator between mankind and Christ.

Though separation of the genders was ideologically considered a norm, it is increasingly clear that women were not 'secluded' in the Byzantine world. The *gynaikonitis* (women's quarters) which was a feature of the palace and noble homes was not an area to which women were restricted, but one where the women of the family could enjoy some privacy and pursue their traditional occupations such as spinning and weaving. 'Respectable' women from the higher socio-economic class were clearly privileged enough to be able to stay at home and delegate activities outside the household to servants and retainers. The majority of the female population, however, which could include anything from housewives and small-scale retailers to prostitutes, maintained a ubiquitous presence on the streets of Byzantine cities as part of their daily routine. Some women had to work outside the house as a matter of course, and housewives would go shopping, attend church services, visit the baths or relatives, and participate in festivals and saints' days. In Constantinople we even hear of girls and upper-class women ("women who had never before left the *gynaikonitis*") taking part in a spontaneous street riot, when the Empress Zoe was threatened with tonsure and exile by her adopted nephew Michael V in April 1042.

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Women also played an important economic role in Byzantium. Aristocratic women could be shop-owners or supervise a workshop in the basement of their house, and women were deeply involved in retail trade as bakers, cooks or innkeepers. They acted as bath keepers, washerwomen, and midwives, maintained a public profile as prostitutes and entertainers, and engaged in specialist trades as weavers and silk-workers. Women could also be extremely wealthy in their own right. Imperial and aristocratic women possessed huge estates and property within Constantinople while Danielis, a widow from Patras, in the ninth century, controlled “not a small part of the Peloponnese”, and reportedly owned innumerable slaves. She freed three thousand of them and settled them in southern Italy. Such women were expected to take an active role in the maintenance of their household and supervision of family, servants and property. Women could play an important role as abbesses and nuns, and noble ladies founded monasteries and acted as patrons of literature. Female literacy was primarily confined to a reading knowledge of the bible and certain saints’ lives, but Byzantium did produce some exceptional female writers.

Since with a few valuable exceptions what we know about women is derived primarily through the viewpoint of male authors, who wrote about and for other men, understanding Byzantine women is to some extent inseparable from understanding Byzantine society as a whole. This volume focuses on how the male authors of the discourse of the dominant ideology viewed, understood and presented the public actions of imperial and non-imperial women in the period. The unique role of women was to bear children to ensure the continuation of the family. They were excluded from the public fields of politics, war and church that rewarded and engaged men. Women from non-élite backgrounds enter the historical record only when they are prominent at court or acquire wealth and influence. Male authors praise women for the traditional qualities of patience, silence, beauty, modesty and fertility. Yet women shared the same perceptions of and engagement with their society and social institutions as men. They engaged in imperial intrigue and family networking, inherited and managed wealth, founded monasteries, traded in the marketplace, bought and sold land and paid taxes.

We are fortunate to have from this period the works of a female poet and hymnographer and a historian. In the ninth century Kassia speaks from the perspective of a woman among women, and about women’s attitudes towards a range of issues and priorities. She provides a suggestive counterpoint to other narratives and a perspective largely absent from the historical literature. Her non-liturgical poems give unvarnished observations on friendship, beauty, women, good and bad fortune, wealth and poverty, and vices such as envy and stupidity. The historian Anna Komnene, eldest

daughter of Alexios I Komnenos, enjoyed an exceptional education and wrote a biography of her father, the *Alexiad*, in the first half of the twelfth century. Her work gives rise to invaluable evidence regarding women's perceptions of the family and for family values generally in the Middle Byzantine period.

The distinguished international authors of this collection discuss central issues including the following: In what ways did the functions of monasteries change for women during the period of Byzantine iconoclasm? (Herrin) Empresses and other imperial women often founded monasteries to which they retired when replaced by a new generation of rulers, or were removed from their quarters in the Great Palace by political change. There is a common pattern of such activity going back to Late Antiquity, but it becomes more pronounced in the late eighth and early ninth century, a period associated with two highly divisive issues: the divorce of Constantine VI and the resumption of iconoclasm by Leo V. This paper explores the question whether such foundations were the result of male pressure on imperial women, who were thus forced to retire from the world of courtly politics to monastic retreats, or whether certain women took the initiative to ensure their own independent and comfortable retirement, as a political insurance against the violent and unsettling times in which they lived. They ensured not only their survival but also prepared a retirement home in which they might enjoy a more peaceful old age in circumstances of their own choosing and ensure the commemoration of their death. Of course, this was not always successful, but there are sufficient clues to indicate a good deal of feminine planning behind the establishment of certain imperial monastic foundations of this period.

What did the abbess Kassia contribute to liturgical and secular poetry in this period? (Silvas). A number of women successfully competed with men in the area of hymnography, foremost amongst them Kassia, for, of the women hymnographers known, only Kassia's works are included in the ecclesiastical books. It is significant that women felt themselves able to write hymns, and even more significant that some of these hymns came to be included in the liturgy, even though some of them are attributed to male authors. Twenty-three of the forty-nine hymns ascribed to Kassia in the manuscripts are considered genuine, and she is well-known for her troparion 'On Mary Magdalene', which is included in the Triodion, as well as for her gnomic poetry. This includes forthright epigrams, beginning 'I hate...', which reflect her disdain for people who behave inappropriately, speak deceptively or do things for selfish reasons. Clearly, in the ninth century, certain women had the inclination to compose both sacred and secular poetry and sufficient education to do so successfully. This paper analyses Kassia's originality of thought and perception of the world, as evidenced in

her hymns and epigrams, and discusses what can be learnt from her work about the ways in which educated women viewed society and social norms of the ninth century.

What should we deduce from the prominence of women in Byzantine fiscal records? (Neville). Understanding any aspect of the lives of Byzantine women is complex because Byzantine women can only be seen through their representations in the surviving literature, law and art. Often these are not women and men, but characters created by authors and artists. Since the writers of tax registers are among the most artless of all conceivable writers, their testimony is important, however terse. The officials who compiled tax registers focused on the task of recording who owed what tax on which piece of land. They used any means necessary to define a given individual precisely: surnames, place names, nicknames and relationships to other individuals. At times the author of the Cadaster of Thebes used a woman's prominence and name recognition as a means of identifying men who were less easily known in their own right. Widows are frequently listed as taxpayers. Some women owned many small plots of land. Some owned watermills. Some owned land they inherited from their husbands. Here we see that one of the positions open to women was that of property owner. This information has the advantage of stemming from a source for which we know the audience and purpose of the writing. The tax assessors wrote registers for tax collectors so that they would know how much each person owed. The author of the register needed to depict the reality of provincial landholding as accurately as possible. Ideas about what roles women should play either in society or in approved literature were not allowed to interfere with the matter at hand. The information provided by the tax register that landowners were frequently women and that this position brought some women public prominence is useful when historians turn to assessing statements about the prominence of women. This paper surveys the evidence provided by fiscal records about the status of women in provincial society and shows how this information may effect our reading of other contemporary sources.

To what extent was a foreign-born empress, without a family network in Byzantium, able to become a player in Byzantine politics and society? (Rapp and Garland). Mary of 'Alania', daughter of Bagrat IV of Georgia, was only the second foreigner to reach the Byzantine throne since Irene, the first wife of Constantine V. Despite her foreign origins, she was to become a significant factor in Byzantine politics and society in the late eleventh century as the wife of Michael VII Doukas. She became empress for the second time by marrying Nikephoros III Botaneiates after his coup d'état during her first husband's lifetime, and was a prime mover in the successful coup of Alexios Komnenos against Nikephoros. She appears to have retained

great influence over Alexios following his accession to the throne, and was later suspected of conspiracy against him. She was also one of the first Byzantine imperial women to act as a patron of art and literature. Although Mary appears to have spent some time in her youth at the Byzantine court, she still has to be considered an outsider forced to act on her own with little or no family support group. Nevertheless, it could be argued that Mary played an important part in setting the scene for the prominent role of imperial women in the twelfth century. Despite her isolation and foreign background, or perhaps because of this, Maria had no compunction in interfering in Byzantine politics. Georgian sources, such as the *Vita* of Giorgi Mtacmideli, are here used to elucidate the details of Mary's background and career as empress of Byzantium and the ways in which she drew on Georgian traditions to contribute to the novel political and economic influence wielded by later Komnenian women.

What can we learn from the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene about family values in the Middle Byzantine period? (Smythe). This paper sets out lines of investigation and outlines what may be considered to be 'traditional Middle Byzantine family values'. The *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene gives a vivid account of the society of Byzantium and its relations with the West at the time of the first and second crusades. As one of the most exceptional historians of Byzantium, her account is vital to our understanding of the period. However she belonged to the generation that was writing not during the reign of her father, Alexios I Komnenos, but during that of her nephew Manuel I Komnenos, and from the time of her father's death she lived in political eclipse in the monastery of Kecharitoumene in Constantinople. The eldest born of the Komnenoi-Doukai *porphyrogennetoi* her goal in life had been to ascend the imperial throne as empress-regnant. The particular focus of Anna's life-experience in this paper is how she related to her father and her family, an important element in the narrative. From the very opening of the work, we are made aware of Anna's relationship with her father and important trends of Middle Byzantine family life are present in *The Alexiad*: the extended family, the network of alliances and family connections, the raising of children by prospective mothers-in-law and the widespread 'adoption' of adults to create a quasi-familial bond.

How did women's clothes in the Middle Byzantine period reflect their occupations and lifestyle? (Dawson). Empresses and ladies of the Byzantine court are regularly shown in their finery in metropolitan pictorial arts and their garments are occasionally mentioned in textual sources, such as books of dream interpretation. In contrast, recovering an impression of the dress of common women is very much more difficult. Where they are depicted in metropolitan art it is normally in the guise of antiquated conventional modesty. More representative hints can be gleaned from the margins of the

empire, especially from the invaluable genre of donor portraits. These indicate that the dress of ordinary women of the Byzantine Empire had much in common with their eastern neighbours. Central to this style was the three-fold tension between the ruling social ideals of modesty, practicality for the various forms of domestic and public labour poorer women were compelled to engage in, and the natural desire for some adornment. This paper demonstrates that the wardrobe available to the women of Byzantium had a generous range of garments and styles, and was well able to address the demands of practicality, the pursuit of pleasure and the limited requirements of propriety.

What part is played by women in the Byzantine novels of the twelfth century? (Jouanno). This study surveys the role of women in the Greek novel, and the ways in which the Byzantine novelists, whose texts reuse ancient models, adapted the 'woman theme' to their medieval readership. In the Byzantine works we no longer find those energetic female characters so noteworthy in the Greek novel (even if Makrembolites' Hysmine may falsely seem to be such at the beginning of the work). And even the sexual symmetry which has been seen as a characteristic feature of the genre in antiquity is much lessened in Byzantium, where heroines are rather submissive and play a less important role than the male protagonists. This is shown by the examination of narrative space – and particularly speeches – ascribed to both sexes. Byzantine heroines are mostly praised for their discretion, embodying the new ideal of a society which was far less permissive towards women than late antiquity had been. But beside this Christian image of feminine modesty, we also find in Byzantine novels passages where extraordinary boldness is ascribed to female characters, generally in fantasy settings or dreams. This striking contrast between two opposing figures of femininity may reflect a tension between the moral standard of the time and the desire of transgression – reality and imagination. In this case, the Byzantine novel is to be read as a play with the norm, literary and ethical.

What part did women play in the street-life and carnival in Constantinople? (Garland). Humour and joking deserve a place among the objects of the new socio-cultural approach to history, following the prominence of gender as a social category worthy of study. The two are united here through an analysis of the ways in which Middle Byzantine texts portray women in the context of humorous and abusive discourse. Byzantium was a society in which crude humour and the joke *per se* were viewed with enthusiasm in most social settings, and women were to some degree not only participants in such humour, but – as might be expected – the objects of it. The misogynistic approach to humour typical of a society which depended so much upon traditions of classical literature, was

compounded by the public prominence of specific women and the ubiquitous appearance of women on the streets. Women are also shown indulging in jokes or abusive language, and appreciating the buffoonery, insults, and personal humiliation which was so much a feature of Byzantine humour. This paper explores the types of humour in which women participated as audience, instigators, or objects-of-attacks in the carnivalesque milieu of eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantium.

What engagement did imperial women have with entertainment at the Byzantine court? (Garland). The fact that genders at court were usually segregated, especially before the Komnenian period, with men and women being separated for official receptions and banquets, has received widespread acceptance. But clearly, under the Komnenoi, males and females at court shared the same space for at least some of the time and also participated in the orchestrated humour enjoyed at court. If any women in Byzantium had the freedom to select their own forms of entertainment and amusement, clearly it would have been women of the imperial family. Empresses are shown as prepared not only to tolerate, but actually to commission and reward performances of slapstick and buffoonery in their private apartments. Other misogynistic humour, for instance in the Ptochoprodromic poems which were arguably intended for a court audience, targets women and their activities, particularly in the domestic context and features sexual innuendo and homosexual allusions. The evidence clearly suggests that this sort of humour was appreciated by one and all.

I am grateful to the authors of the articles for joining me in this exciting project. I also want to thank a number of other people who have contributed in different ways to this project: Wendy Pank for her editorial collaboration and her ability to solve computer problems and software incompatibilities; Judith Herrin for her supervision of the volume and insightful suggestions at all levels; Paul Lancaster for his editorial advice; Matina McGrath for her initial involvement in the project; and Alice-Mary Talbot as Director of Byzantine Studies at Dumbarton Oaks, where this volume was first conceived.



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Changing Functions of Monasteries for Women during Byzantine Iconoclasm

Judith Herrin
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Although monasticism is often presented as a bastion of orthodoxy in Byzantium, and its members as valiant opponents of heresy, celibate communities like all parts of the Orthodox Church were pressured to conform to imperial definitions of theological belief. This was a more serious institutional problem for monasteries founded and controlled by emperors, but it affected all those that were within the reach of imperial officials.¹ Even the bishop of Rome, residing far from Constantinople (New Rome), could be subjected to humiliating treatment as Pope Vigilius was in the sixth century or Pope Martin in the seventh. Indeed, Pope Martin and St Maximos the Confessor and his two companions were put on trial and sentenced to exile. The three monks were also mutilated (Louth 1996: 3–18). In circumstances of imperial pressure the abbots of monasteries normally gave their approval to whatever change was decreed, whether in canons issued by oecumenical councils or edicts promulgated by individual rulers. It required great courage to oppose official theology publicly in Byzantium and often led to death.

Monastic institutions were also used for purposes which had little to do with the original inspiration of those seeking to pursue the ascetic life. The basic principle that no person should be forced to adopt the celibate life of the monastic was regularly overridden, for example when impoverished parents forced their unmarried daughters to enter nunneries. St Basil had drawn attention to this and urged the obvious solution – to provide dowries

¹ On the complex relationship between state and church in Byzantium, see Dagron 1996; Herrin 1987: 116–18. On imperial monasteries, see Thomas 1987, who traces the process by which emperors took control over private foundations and then used them as gifts to reward their followers: see esp. 123–30 (on the period under discussion here); *Vita* of Stephen the Younger, paras. 41–5 (Auzépy 1999: 84) on *ta Philippikou* at Chrysopolis, a foundation of the early seventh century which had passed under imperial control.

for such girls. At a time when the concept of a regular prison system was barely known outside of Constantinople and confiscation of property, loss of title and exile remained traditional punishments, monasteries also served as places where rebels and usurpers, unsuccessful emperors, rejected suitors and political rivals might be kept.² Already in sixth-century Italy Pope Gregory I records concern over nuns, clerics and lay people, who had been condemned by ecclesiastical and civil courts to serve periods of penance in monasteries (Guillou 1983). Their stay was financed by the economic resources which they controlled prior to their convictions. Gregory documents clear abuse by the monasteries in question; they deprived their 'prisoners' of food and clothing, which he describes as the basic necessities of life. In Byzantium also isolated rural monasteries were regularly fortified and urban foundations well protected by high walls like castles, so they could provide a secure jail for convicted murderers, assassins, political opponents and less dangerous enemies of the ruling party.³

The detention of political opponents in monasteries assumed more formal patterns at the end of the seventh century: after the coup d'état mounted by Apsimar-Tiberios in 698 Emperor Leontios was mutilated and sent to be kept under guard in the monastery of Delmatou (Dalmatou), the oldest in the city.⁴ Similarly, in May 713, Artemios-Anastasios ordered that Philippikos should be blinded and thus rendered incapable of ruling. Then the new emperor sent him to the same foundation (*mone tes Dalmatou*) where he appears to have lived for several months before he died. This pattern was particularly suited to sudden changes of political regime when rebels who successfully usurped the throne needed to dispose of the rulers they had replaced and their families. Of course, several appreciated the dangers of resisting the new regime and sought a refuge in monastic 'retirement'. In 715 Patriarch Germanos persuaded Artemios-Anastasios to adopt this strategy and he secured the much lesser punishment of exile to Thessaloniki, while two years later it was successfully repeated for Theodosios III.⁵

² See Ph. Koukoules 1948 in French, cf. 1949 in Greek, for a useful survey of prisons.

³ Maximos Confessor and his companions were moved from one stronghold to another in Lazica on the eastern frontier of the empire, while Pope Martin was sent to the Crimea. Islands and the southern Peloponnese were also used as places of exile.

⁴ Theophanes AM 6190; Nikephoros 41. Cf. Dagron 1970: 229–76, esp. 232–3; and Janin 1969 (1), on the Dalmatou foundation. On this centre of iconophile opposition, see Auzépy 1999: 161–2, 180, and on monasteries as prisons, see Guillaud 1951.

⁵ Theophanes AM 6207, 6211; Nikephoros 51–2, 57; Auzépy 1999: 290. Thessaloniki thus became a centre of ex-rulers and attracted other disaffected generals who resented Leo III's triumph. While Artemios and other residents of Thessaloniki were drawn into an unsuccessful conspiracy and were beheaded, Theodosios managed to avoid involvement in the plot.

In exceptional cases the punishment was extended to women. After the coup d'état of Phokas in 602, the wife and daughters of the previous ruler Maurice were imprisoned, first in a private house and later in a nunnery in Constantinople. In 606 Constantina was tortured until she revealed the names of conspirators against Phokas; she and her daughters were then killed (Theophanes AM 6095, 6098–9). Both female and male relatives of deposed rulers, military supporters of unsuccessful revolts and their wives, as well as deposed patriarchs, bishops, monks and their female supporters, who had led the opposition to official policy, might find themselves so restricted. Ecclesiastical law also required that if a married priest was elevated to a bishopric, his marriage had to be dissolved and his wife had to agree to enter a nunnery far away from her husband's new see.⁶ In a similar fashion to that described by Pope Gregory, the bishop also had to provide her with sufficient wealth to ensure that the institution received economic support and compensation for her enforced retirement which was intended to last her lifetime.

Monasteries in medieval Byzantium thus served a range of functions as well as perpetuating the traditional aims of asceticism. Imperial intervention and pressure to conform was well established long before 717 when Leo III gained the throne. Since the seminal analysis by Ihor Ševčenko (1977), the fate of monks and nuns under iconoclasm has been debated within the novel understanding that many voluntarily supported the official policy between 730 and 787 and again between 815 and 842. Naturally the surviving sources emphasize the resistance and heroism of iconophiles yet many members of monastic communities must have accepted imperial iconoclast decrees. Indeed, the wholesale replacement of groups antagonistic to iconoclasm by favourable ones is a distinct feature of the ninth-century period of persecution documented by the correspondence of St Theodore.⁷ From exile he created a virtual community of the Stoudios brethren scattered in different regions, a tribute to the strength of the monastery's identity which had been taken over by an iconoclast group loyal to Emperors Leo V and Michael II.

In the light of the rapid changes of ecclesiastical policy that had already accounted for many abuses of monastic institutions it is instructive to re-examine the history of new foundations during the eighth and ninth centuries (Huxley 1988: 11–24, for the period of Iconoclasm). Among dedicated Christians monastic foundations continued the pattern of the oldest motivation, namely the family decision to embrace a spiritual lifestyle. This was manifested by the parents of St Theodore of the Stoudios in about

⁶ Rhalles-Potles 2:330–1; cf. Nedungatt and Featherstone 1995: 130.

⁷ Auzépy 1988, 1999: 271–88; Rouan 1981: 415–36; and, on the early ninth century, see the correspondence of St Theodore of the Stoudios: Hatlie 1996: 37–44; Ševčenko 1995: 91–105.

783 when Theodore's uncle Platon founded Sakkoudion on family property in Bithynia and his father and brothers retired to it, while Theodore's mother Theoktiste and his previously consecrated sister adopted the monastic life together with some kinswomen. In his encomium for his mother, Theodore states that there was no monastery, nor spiritual guide for them, so Platon persuaded the women to live 'as if in a lavra' (κελλιωτικῶς). Both parts of the family thus embraced an ascetic existence.⁸ But the later history of these monasteries exemplifies a major difference between them – the ephemeral nature of female foundations. Sakkoudion, which was later moved to the Stoudios area of the capital, became an outstanding beacon of disciplined celibate practice for men. In contrast, the monastic cells occupied by Theodore's mother and sister have no history whatsoever. Indeed, the Greek expression suggests a very informal arrangement which probably did not survive their deaths.

Within other families ascetic commitment often had to wait for the death of a father or husband. Although Stephen and his sister joined monastic communities during the lifetime of their parents it was only after their father's death between 730 and 754 that Stephen could sell the family property in Constantinople and establish a monastery on Mt Auxentios. He then brought his mother and another sister to the community at *ta Trikhinareai* on which his own foundation depended (Auzépy 1997: paras. 11–12, 16; 1999: 82–3). The *Lives* of several devout women recognised as saints during the period under discussion confirm that the opportunity to realise their religious calling was only practical after the death of their male relatives. St Athanasia of Aegina had to wait until her second husband retired to a monastery before she could do the same.⁹

Another typical instance is recorded in the *Life* of St Anthousa, who manifested her commitment to the ascetic life from an early age and was guided by her spiritual director to found a house for women on an island in the middle of a lake near Mantineon in Paphlagonia (Talbot 1998: 13–19). After the death of her spiritual father Sisinnios, many of his monks came to live on the shores of the lake and put themselves under her authority. As the leader of this double monastery Anthousa attracted a crowd of iconophiles who are said to have numbered 900. After the Council of Hiercia (754) Constantine V ordered the saint and her nephew who was in charge of the monks to conform to his iconoclast decrees but after barbaric tortures the

⁸ Theodore, 'Encomium for his mother' = Oratio 13, vii, *PG* 99, 893A; and *Life of Theodore* = *BHG* 2422; see also *Prosopography of the Byzantine World*, I: (641–867), ed. J.R. Martindale (Aldershot, 2001) CD ROM, sv. Theoktiste 3, Theodoros 15. Similarly, when St Peter of Atroa supervised the dissolution of his sister's marriage, she and her daughters entered a nunnery and her husband and sons joined St Peter at his better-known foundation, see Huxley 1998: 15.

⁹ *Life* edited by Carras 1984: 199–224; tr. by L.F. Sherry in Talbot 1996: 137–58.

persecution was abandoned and St Anthousa was sent into exile. Later she predicted the safe birth of twins to the emperor's third wife and in gratitude Empress Eudokia named the female child Anthousa and donated numerous villages and offerings to the community. The double monastery was spared further attacks even though it did not conform to the emperor's iconoclast requirements (Mango 1982).

One curious consequence of Empress Eudokia's patronage of the monastery is that her daughter named Anthousa after the saint also pursued a religious calling and persisted in the same iconophile tradition. She entered the monastery of Eumenia (possibly Homonoia), otherwise unknown, in the capital (Talbot 1998: 23–4). Several other nunneries mentioned in the Lives of eighth- and ninth-century saints indicate a considerable number of undocumented female houses: a nun of the monastery of Kounin (*Life* of Ioannikios, para. 44); the nun of a distinguished family from the region of Kountouria, whose daughter was cured by Ioannikios (para. 46); the abbess of Kloubiou and her daughter, who later inherited the role (paras. 57–8) (Talbot 1998: 302, 304–5, 322–5). During the reign of Leo V, a rich woman transformed her house in Constantinople into a nunnery where she lived with her three daughters and maids (Huxley 1988: 12). These brief mentions are all we know about the communities, some of which are not even identified by name.

Although Anthousa's foundation is better documented than many nunneries, it illustrates the difficulty of studying the history of female monasticism in Byzantium. From the *Life* of St Romanos, who was sent on a mission in 771 by Anthousa and was captured and martyred by Arabs, we learn a little about how it functioned. We may assume that the monks and nuns commemorated the death of their founder and Sisinnios, said prayers for the well-being of their souls, and marked their anniversaries with philanthropic distributions to the poor. These functions were widespread in all medieval societies. But the foundation charter (*typikon*) of this famous double monastery with some record of the founder's intentions has not been preserved. And most of the evidence for female communities that does survive relates to women of high status with wealth of their own.

Nevertheless, when a nunnery is established it normally creates opportunities for others. Young and old may join and perform the monastic routines expected of those who dedicate themselves to the religious life. So in tracing the proliferation of foundations by those in the upper echelons of Byzantine society, the history of anonymous and poorer women is enriched. Whether these unnamed nuns became literate and were enrolled in the ranks of monastics with official responsibilities (*oikonomos* or *sakellarios*, for example), or merely swept the church, removed the burnt candles and guarded the doors (*thyroros*), they participated in the life of the nunnery. And

they lived by the same regulations which ensured that all participated in the monastic life, chanting the offices, fetching firewood, assisting in the kitchen and caring for the elderly. Evidence from a later period documents the role of the *ekklesiarchissa*, who trained the nuns in ecclesiastical chant and taught the younger ones to read.¹⁰ It is clear that wealthy recruits were expected to perform the most menial tasks and abbesses might be quite strict with women of high status.¹¹

Tantalising references in the work of female hymnographers reveal the existence of otherwise unknown communities and dedicated nuns who performed the liturgy and sang the hymns composed by their most skilled members. Much mythology surrounds the figure of Kassia, celebrated as one of the very few Byzantine female poets (Rochow 1967: 5–29; Topping 1982/83; see Silvas in this volume). Although she is supposed to have taken part in the beauty contest organised by Euphrosyne for her stepson Theophilos, the story can not be taken at face value. Later historians like to present her retirement from the world as a result of her failure to please the young emperor, but she must have been first and foremost a dedicated nun. Kassia became famous for her liturgical poetry and hymns and her name became attached to a monastery in the Byzantine capital.¹²

While her writings were particularly celebrated she was not the only female monastic with such gifts: Theodosia also wrote hymns in praise of Ioannikios the iconophile hero of the ninth century and Thekla's verses in praise of the Virgin Mary exalted the position of women and encouraged their all female houses (Topping 1982/83: 102–7; 1994/95). These three unusually creative nuns contributed to the development of hymnography which occurred during the iconoclast period and came to fruition after 843. Thekla is perhaps most significant in that she wrote for nuns who performed her hymn dedicated to the Theotokos with its “exclusively feminine perspective” (Topping 1982/83: 105). Joseph the Hymnographer and others promoted the development of chant for men at the same time.

Unspecific references in the correspondence of St Theodore also reveal many iconophile abbesses and lay women, praised by the saint for their support of the persecuted monks. He writes appreciatively of their courage in taking food and comfort to those in prison, and of their steadfastness under threat which is stronger than that of some men.¹³ Frustratingly for the

¹⁰ See the fascinating study by Dubowchik (2002).

¹¹ See the evidence for monastic routines in the useful collection of female saints' lives (Talbot 1996); Herrin 2001: 141–2, 145–6.

¹² *Patria* 3.196, p. 276–7 describes her as follows: εὐπρεποῦς καὶ εὐλαβοῦς καὶ σεβασμίας γυναικός, ὥραίας τῷ εἶδει τῆς τε κανόνας καὶ στίχους ποιήσασης, in the time of Theophilos and Michael.

¹³ For the correspondence of St Theodore of the Stoudios, see Gouillard 1982: part iii, 445–52; and Hatlie 1999a, 1999b.

historian, no details of the nunneries under their control are given: the names and geographical locations do not add much to the history of female monasticism. Yet his praise must reflect a notable strength in nuns and often highly placed secular women which is not always paralleled among monks and laymen. So the devotion of women to their icons and to those who were persecuted for refusing to remove and destroy them may have a base in gender differences, but it also seems more than likely that many communities changed sides just as bishops did – political loyalty and survival were probably stronger than theological definition in ninth-century Byzantium.¹⁴

An alternative pattern of patronage by the wealthy can be observed when women become tarnished by their close association with figures who fall out of favour; this is most visible at the highest levels of the ruling classes. The fate of these women may be determined by the creation of a house monastery to which they may retire, perhaps with a promise not to disturb the new political situation. The increasing number of such foundations dating from the turbulent period of iconoclasm suggests a possible shift in their function. During an epoch when monasteries were often the objects of unwanted imperial attention, it seems that women of the political elite followed men in planning a monastic foundation as their own private retirement home, a sort of insurance policy against a poverty-stricken old age, or relegation to a monastery selected by others. By establishing a community into which they could retire, members of leading families tried to guarantee a peaceful end. While the practice is not entirely new, it seems to become more widespread in this period. The question is: are these communities set up as real monasteries or do they serve a different purpose? And the aim of this brief article is to survey some of the evidence and suggest a conclusion.

As an instance of this practice Domnika, a wealthy Constantinopolitan lady, provides a curious illustration. She was the wife of Bardanes, *strategos* of the Anatolikon, and also the mother of Thekla to whom Michael of Amorion was married long before he became emperor (before 803, according to Treadgold 1988: 132). After the failure of the revolt against Emperor Nikephoros in 803 Bardanes retired into his own monastic foundation on the island of Prote and thus avoided death, though he was later blinded as a

¹⁴ See, for example, the instances of crypto-iconophiles documented in the letters of St Theodore (Ševčenko 1995: esp. 99–104). In the 820s, when the abbess of Irene's foundation on Prinkipo was approached by Emperor Michael II, her community must have been formally observing the official position on icons, which was less virulent but still remained opposed to their use as visual aids in worship. She would hardly have risked opposing this policy if a woman in her care, Euphrosyne, was about to become empress, and probably anticipated further imperial support.

precaution.¹⁵ Some of his family property in the capital was confiscated but Domnika was permitted to retain enough to found a monastery for herself and her unmarried daughter and step-daughters. In this way the new emperor ensured the removal of a dangerous military rival, Bardanes, together with his wife and female relatives (Theophanes Continuatus 9–10). Nothing further is heard of the nunnery created in this private house in Constantinople. It is not at all clear whether it survived as a real monastery or merely served as a place of refuge for a woman of high rank whose husband had fallen foul of the imperial authorities.

A similar strategy appears to have been employed by Michael Rhangabe and Prokopia in October 811, when it was obvious that Emperor Staurakios, Nikephoros's son, was too ill to live long. While he was forced to abdicate and adopt monastic garb his wife Theophano hoped to retain some imperial power: it was even said that Staurakios intended to make her his successor, so that she could rule as Irene had done in 780 (Theophanes AM 6303). But Staurakios's sister Prokopia was adamant that *her* husband should inherit imperial power and sought the support of Patriarch Nikephoros and others. Once Michael Rhangabe had been acclaimed, he therefore 'enriched Theophano, the wife of Staurakios who had become a nun, as well as her relatives who had lived wretchedly under Nikephoros. Amongst others, he ceded to her an imposing mansion, called *ta Hebraika*, to be made into a monastery: that is where Staurakios was buried'.¹⁶ In this case, the deposed Empress Theophano acquired a property in which her husband could be interred with the appropriate rites. Presumably she continued to reside in the monastery known as *ta Hebraika* and was eventually buried there beside her husband.

The concern of women to ensure the proper burial of their male relatives undoubtedly encouraged this development. In times of persecution they regularly tried to gain possession of any Christian bodies which might be denied this important ritual. Together with mourning and praying for the soul of the departed women took special care of burials. In 760 Constantine V manifested his determination to enforce the iconoclast decrees of the Council of Hiercia and had the monk Andreas Kalybites whipped and scourged to death in the hippodrome at St Mamas. However when he ordered the martyred saint's remains to be thrown into the Bosphoros, Andreas' sisters managed to smuggle them away for a proper burial. In this way the first iconophile martyr acquired a tomb at Leukadion where later followers could pay their respects (Theophanes AM 6253). In similar fashion

¹⁵ Theophanes AM 6295, cf. AM 6296 for the blinding by the Lykaonians; on the revolt, see Kountoura-Galake 1983.

¹⁶ The location is unknown: Theophanes AM 6304 (Mango-Scott 1997: 677). *De Cerimoniis* 647 records the fact that the couple were joined in death at the tomb in this monastery.

when the sisters of Emperor Michael III discovered that he had been murdered they found and buried his body in a monastery on the Asian side of the Bosphoros. Only much later did Leo VI fetch the bones and inter them in the imperial mausoleum attached to the Holy Apostles (Herrin 2002: 293).

In cases of a disputed succession the weaker of two imperial rivals often found a method of saving his life by changing imperial costume for the monastic habit. A century after the examples of Artemios-Anastasios and Theodosios III, when Leo the Armenian entered the capital on Monday 11 July 813, Emperor Michael I, and Prokopia in their turn sought refuge in the church. They cut off their hair and adopted monastic clothing (Theophanes AM 6305). Leo was then acclaimed and crowned as Leo V. Indeed, Leo was surprisingly generous to his predecessor: he established an annual subsidy in gold for his lifetime in a monastery on the Princes Islands. Prokopia retired to the monastery she had founded, suitably called *ta Prokopias*.¹⁷ The fate of the children was not so easy. Leo V insisted that the sons of Michael and Prokopia should be castrated as well as tonsured, so that they would never be able to aspire to imperial power. After many years as monks, one was summoned by Empress Theodora to become patriarch with the name Ignatios (Herrin 2001: 216). This pattern was repeated only seven years later when Michael II claimed the throne from Leo V in 820. After subjecting his predecessor's body to dreadful mutilations, he ordered the castration of the four sons, forcing their mother Theodosia to witness the event (Theophanes Continuatus 46). While the body of the ex-emperor was buried on the island of Prote, the ex-empress was confined in the monastery of the emperors (*mone ton despoton*) together with her mother-in-law, Leo V's mother. This constitutes one of the clearest instances of the use of an imperial monastery for non-monastic purposes.

While the children of defeated emperors and unsuccessful rebels had always been subjected to severe punishment to prevent them from realizing their imperial claims, the process may have been intensified by the rivalry between iconophile and iconoclast rulers. An interesting instance occurred shortly after Constantine's victory over his brother-in-law, Artabasdos. At the conclusion of the civil war in 743, Artabasdos and his sons were imprisoned and later subjected to a public humiliation in the Hippodrome, then blinded and exiled to the Chora monastery. Anna, his wife, and the remaining children accompanied them. Constantine ordered that all the sons should be

¹⁷ Genesios 1.5 records their fate; Michael I lived on until 844 (see Grierson 1962: 56); *Patria* 3.153, 264–5 calls Prokopia, *despoina*, daughter of Nikephoros 'the Seleukenos', and wife of Michael Rangabe the *apokouropalates*.

blinded so that they could never lay claim to the imperial position through their father. Artabasdos had crowned the eldest Nikephoros emperor.¹⁸

Later authors associate the Chora with a strong iconophile tradition developed in opposition to Constantine V, which was symbolized by the burial there of ex-Patriarch Germanos at an unknown date. When the blinded rebel Artabasdos and his family were incarcerated at the Chora, it was already a lay establishment according to the anonymous author of the *Life of Michael the synkellos*. One of the charges regularly levelled against Constantine V by his opponents was that he laicised key monasteries and turned them into barracks (Theophanes AM 6259). But this process may have involved the replacement of iconophile centres of resistance by groups of monks loyal to the emperor's iconoclast policies. This can be observed at the Stoudios monastery early in the ninth century when Leo V wished to disperse the large, devoutly iconophile community established by St Theodore. But in the 740s when Artabasdos was incarcerated at the Chora his wife Anna seems to have played quite a significant role. She looked after him and their nine children until their deaths and buried them all there close to the relics of Germanos. She thus helped to create a shrine to the defeated rebel, once a trusted lieutenant of Leo III, and prevented the *damnatio memoriae* which Constantine wished to enforce. Her success may be judged by the fact that 30 years later the emperor forced Anna to exhume her husband's bones and throw them into the pit at *ta Pelagiou* where the bodies of common criminals, those who died an illicit death and unbaptised pagans were dumped (Theophanes 6235).¹⁹ But the family tombs remained at Chora.

In the ninth century this distinct iconophile tradition was maintained by an exiled group of monks banished to one of the Chora's landed possessions outside the walls of Constantinople. After the restoration of Orthodoxy in 843 they returned to the mother house where Michael the *synkellos* was appointed abbot by Patriarch Methodios. Subsequently, Theodora and Michael III restored all the property which had been confiscated by Constantine V and reasserted the 'imperial' nature of the Chora foundation.²⁰ This partisan account of its history during iconoclasm overlooks the fact that a monastic foundation could function as a prison without infringing on its religious activities, even if these were subject to imperial pressure. It seems unlikely that the iconoclast occupation of well-known communities diminished their ascetic role which continued without the use

¹⁸ *The Life of Michael the Synkellos*, para. 28 (Cunningham 1991: esp. 108–9); Nikephoros 65, 66; Speck 1981: 37; Rochow 1986: 191–7.

¹⁹ This was the pit into which the remains of St Stephen the Younger were unceremoniously thrown after his martyrdom in 765 (Theophanes AM 6257, Nikephoros 81).

²⁰ *The Life of Michael the Synkellos*, para 32 (Cunningham 1991: 114–6).

of icons. But this is not recorded in the very partial sources which document monastic life at the Chora.

With the proviso that it is very hard to know how such apparently political and sometimes temporary foundations actually functioned, let us examine the famous example of Irene the Athenian. She became empress of Byzantium by her marriage to Leo IV, shared his rule from 775–80, and then clung to power as the widowed mother of young Constantine VI until 802. Early during her Regency Irene appears to have established a community of nuns on Prinkipo, one of the Princes Islands in the Sea of Marmara, considered distant enough from the capital to provide a suitably deserted environment (Herrin 2001: 104). At this point in her imperial career, she probably anticipated that when she died she would be buried next to her husband at the imperial mausoleum of the Holy Apostles, but this was not to be. After the coup d'état of Nikephoros I, who banished her to her own community in 802, Irene expressed the wish to be buried in the church of her monastery which was dedicated to the Virgin and this indeed happened.²¹

There is no doubt about the nature of this monastery, which became well known and attracted women of high status who wished to embrace the ascetic life. A key instance is provided by Megalo, wife of Theophanes the Confessor, when the childless couple decided to separate. On entering Irene's nunnery, she adopted the monastic name Irene, while her ex-husband went off to another foundation on the Princes Islands and thus began his better-known career as a calligrapher and chronicle writer. From his *Life* it is evident that both parties took considerable wealth with them and thus added to the endowments of the communities they joined.²² Megalo-Irene probably remained a member of the community founded by Irene and may have been alive to witness the arrival of the empress's daughter-in-law Maria, who was banished from the court by Constantine VI in 794. In this instance, however, the new 'nun' had no desire to adopt the monastic life; it was forced upon her quite improperly and provoked a major split in the Byzantine church. From this monastic exile Maria would appeal to those who supported her cause, notably St Theodore of the Stoudios, campaigning against the illegal divorce imposed on her (Herrin 2001: 96–8).

So within ten years of the empress's foundation on Prinkipo two distinguished women had joined it – one presumably out of religious commitment, the other unwillingly. In the case of Maria and her two young

²¹ Theophanes AM 6295; Treadgold 1982: 236–51, 245 for the chapel of St Nikolaos (complete Greek text in Halkin 1988).

²² Mango-Scott 1997: xliv–li (for the two basic sources of information on Theophanes, the *Enkomion* by Theodoros of the Stoudios and the *Life* by Methodios); see *Life* ch. 20–1 on the property given to the monasteries.

daughters, Irene's role remains unknown. It was common enough for monasteries on the Princes Islands to be used as places of exile for men, religious opponents as well as potential rivals to imperial power. So there was a distinctly coercive aspect to some of these isolated foundations from which escape was quite unlikely. In 765 Constantine V exiled his namesake Patriarch Constantine there while he decided what to do with him. Two years later the 'false' patriarch was recalled to the city to be beaten, publicly humiliated and tortured to death in the Hippodrome (Theophanes AM 6257, 6259).²³ During the early ninth century St Theodore and his disciples were regularly moved from one monastic confinement to another. Maria, however, was never moved or allowed to leave Prinkipo. She was kept in Irene's foundation, where her elder daughter Irene died and was probably laid to rest. She may still have been alive at the time of Irene's death in 803, when the body was returned from Lesbos to Prinkipo to be buried as the founder and ex-empress wished.

Several of Maria's other relatives, who had accompanied her to Constantinople in 788 on the occasion of her marriage, also ended their days in monasteries of the capital. Philaretos, her grandfather, had purchased a tomb in the church of St Andrew *en Krisei*; her grandmother eventually joined him there after spending her last years of life in Amnia doing good works.²⁴ Two of her aunts and three uncles remained in Constantinople and were allegedly buried in monastic graves though none can be documented by independent evidence. Given the particular nature of the *Life of Philaretos*, Maria's cousin Niketas may have wished to stress the religiosity of their relatives. An alternative reading might confirm how many individuals closely related to the imperial dynasty were obliged to seek a refuge in monastic communities when she fell from favour. On this basis, one could emphasize the problems affecting all those members of the large family of Philaretos, who had sought their fortunes in the capital city only to be tarred by Maria's dishonourable divorce (Auzépy 1993: 117–35; Rydén, 106–10).

Since Irene was responsible for a large number of charitable foundations her monastery does not appear to fall into the category of a retirement home, a refuge from the political violence and unsettling times in which she lived. Yet that is the purpose it ultimately served. And its political function as a secure place of confinement for Maria and her daughters connects it with other imperial foundations. These features also established a model, which

²³ Nikephoros 83 and 84, however, records that Constantine was exiled to Hiercia, the palace on the Asian coast of the Bosphoros. Both authors mention that his body was finally thrown into the pit at *ta Pelagiou*.

²⁴ 'La Vie de S. Philarète' (Fourmy and Leroy 1934: 85–170); see now the new edition and translation by Rydén 2002, and the reference to large sums of money being distributed to the needy on the occasion of Philaretos's burial, at which the emperor, Constantine VI, his mother Irene and his wife Maria participated: Rydén, 110.

was followed by other independent women. Once Irene's younger granddaughter, Euphrosyne, had been permitted to leave the foundation on Prinkipo and take up an imperial role, she founded her own nunnery in Constantinople, known as the monastery of the lady Euphrosyne. And to this foundation she later brought the relics of her mother and father, Maria of Amnia and Constantine VI, and of her sister Irene, thus creating a shrine to her unhappy family, in which she was later laid to rest (Herrin 2001: 183–4; Herrin 2002: 291).

For an apparently 'political' foundation to survive, the creation of a genuine religious community was critical. It required the services of dedicated nuns to ensure the dynastic function of a family shrine. If a collection of graves was to function as a shrine, it was necessary for a monastic community to perform the commemorative prayers and liturgies on the correct days. Euphrosyne, and later her step-daughter-in-law Theodora, therefore ensured that their nunneries were well endowed and attracted a sufficient number of dedicated nuns to function efficiently. In the case of Theodora, her mother Florina-Theoktiste had retired to a monastery known by the name *ta Gastria* and this became the family shrine. Theodora buried her mother there, then her brothers, a niece and her daughters were all brought together to this family mausoleum, in which she herself was buried at some date after 867 (Herrin 2001: 233–5). Although there is no record of Theodora's testamentary arrangements, we can assume that on the anniversary of her death and the deaths of her relatives, prayers would be said for the salvation of their souls, and distributions of coin or provisions made to the poor.

Later documents make clear how individuals established the required services. Gifts of land and moveable property to the monasteries on Mount Athos were made on condition that the monks agreed to maintain an annual celebration of the donor. Empress Eudokia was surely remembered in the prayers of the nuns and monks at St Anthousa's double monastery at Mantineon. Often a special grave space inside the church was requested but the key factor was prayers for the souls of the dead.²⁵ In this way communities acquired resources which in turn supported their dedicated monastics, whose liturgical interventions were considered so effective. Since this mechanism was probably in use from a much earlier date, we can assume that Theodora had negotiated such an arrangement with the nuns at *ta*

²⁵ See, for instance, the acts of donation collected in Lemerle et al. 1970. No. 20, 155–61 (AD 1016) concerns a nun, Glykeria, a childless widow on Skyros, who donates all the land that belongs to her to a monk (Eustratios) and his fraternity at Lavra 'for the salvation of their [i.e. her and her dead husband's] souls'; cf. no. 15. 141–4 (1012), reference to an earlier donation by Glykeria; and no. 18, 148–51 (1014), a donation of land to Lavra by the Lagoudes, a childless couple.

Gastria. Certainly, in the tenth century the disposition of graves remained the same, and it seems very likely that the community was still admitting women who wished to dedicate their lives to prayer and contemplation.

By combining a religious foundation with an imperial tomb, Euphrosyne, Theodora and later rulers draw attention to a novel and very significant aspect of such a private house monastery – it might function as a shrine to a deceased ruler, who was denied burial in the imperial mausoleum. Because the imperial tombs at the Holy Apostles were visited on numerous occasions during the year, every emperor wanted to control access to them. In turn, each tried to ensure that he would be buried there, where his successors would be obliged to light candles and say prayers in accordance with the prescribed ceremonies.²⁶ Similarly, it was essential to deny unworthy candidates the accolade of imperial burial among the relics of the Apostles. So those who died in adverse circumstances, and there were many in the eighth and ninth centuries, had to be laid to rest elsewhere. The private house monastery provided a suitable venue.

One of the most striking examples is provided by the sorry tale of Constantine VI's final years. After the blinding in 797 ordered by his mother, his second wife Theodote looked after him in the private palace to which they retired. He did not die immediately, indeed he lived longer than Irene. By 806, however, it seems that Constantine was dead and Theodote had buried him in their residence which she transformed into a monastery.²⁷ Since the debate over her marriage still divided the church and Emperor Nikephoros had had her condemned as an adulterer, her decision to retire into a monastery seems quite natural and extremely likely. Later sources claim it was called *Metanoia*, an echo of the sixth-century house of repentance founded by Justinian's wife Theodora for reformed prostitutes. Others indicate that Theodote gave her own name to it, or that it was known as the *mone ton Isidorou*, after a much earlier patrician owner.²⁸ Whatever the

²⁶ *De Cerimoniis* 1.10 on the Easter Monday celebrations at the Church of the Holy Apostles; see also Herrin 2002: 287–94.

²⁷ Lilie 1996: 273–7. She could not prevent the later removal of the relics of Constantine VI, whose daughter Euphrosyne installed them in her own shrine: see Herrin 2001: 161–2.

²⁸ This foundation is commemorated in two distinct traditions. The more credible version preserved by Symeon Magister, 646, records that in the 830s Theophilus restored a *xenon*, which dated back to the time of Constantine the Great and had been founded by the *patrikios* Isidore who came from Rome with Olybrios. Later it became the house of Constantine VI. The *Patria* 2.65 (185–7) adds a long mythical story of the association of the monument with adultery. A seal of the *mone ton Isidorou* (Janin 1969 (3): 263) confirms the existence of such a monastery. The alternative account given by George the Monk, 209, the anonymous author of the *Synopsis Chronike* (Sathas 1894, 7: 136), and the *Patria* 2.185, suggests that Theodote and her monastic companions fell on hard times and appealed to Theophilus, who came to visit them and offered to move them to better quarters. He restored the building as a *xenon* and established them

identification, Theodote's monastic retirement indicates a method of surviving old age with some modicum of independence.

In conclusion, during this period of rapid change women connected with the imperial dynasties seem to have taken the initiative in preparing their own places of burial, often by establishing a monastic community where they would be commemorated on the days of their deaths. They used their wealth and political acumen to avoid being exiled to a place not of their own choosing. Having thus guaranteed a secure tomb, they might extend the stratagem to include their male relatives. In this way they hoped to ensure that the entire family survived a period of exclusion from political favour. The model they set up appears to have been followed by other women for similar reasons. If any serious commemoration was needed dedicated ascetics would have to perform the necessary liturgies. Other women with fewer resources, who might not share the same political aims might nonetheless be empowered to follow a monastic calling. Through these novel forms of monastic life, elite women tried to ensure the salvation of their own souls and the celebration of their families for posterity.²⁹ And in so doing they perpetuated feminine traditions of celibate monasticism, which encouraged others to dedicate themselves to Christ.³⁰

elsewhere, not too far away, probably on the slope from Zeugma to the Golden Horn on the third hill of Constantinople.

²⁹ Morris 1995: 52 deplors the lack of information about nuns and female houses in Byzantium prior to about AD 1000, but lists many saints' *Lives* which do help to illustrate their existence.

³⁰ I presented an earlier version of this paper at the University of Barcelona in November 2002, and would like to thank Professors Monserrat Camps-Gasset and Ernest Marcos for inviting me and for making such useful comments.



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Kassia the Nun c.810–c.865: an Appreciation

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Introduction

Kassia, Cassia, Kasia, Kassiane, Eikasia or Ikasia, as her name is variously recorded, was a nun of ninth-century Constantinople and the outstanding female poet of the Middle Byzantine period. Among the hundreds of hymnographers in the Eastern Church, only four women are positively identified: Theodosia, Thekla, Kassia and Palaiologina (Topping 1982/83), and of these, only one had her works admitted into the liturgical books: Kassia. She is unique. Moreover, she composed a body of non-liturgical verse, in which she comments on the social life of her times. Furthermore, three letters to her from St Theodore the Studite have survived, giving us a precious glimpse into her early life and character. Lastly, there was the tradition of her appearance in an imperial ‘bride-show’, which became the stuff of folklore in the following centuries, while the character portrayed in her most famous hymn (treated later in this paper) was applied to her, so that it was thought that she herself had been a ‘fallen woman’, a misconception corrected by Topping (1981). By revisiting these sources this paper hopes to present a fresh appreciation of the person of Kassia. How did this spirited, educated, highly gifted woman steer her way in the mid-Byzantine era during which she lived? What is the character of her spiritual doctrine? What is her ‘theology’ of woman?

Kassia’s Life and Times

Kassia was born around the year 810 to an aristocratic family of Constantinople.¹ From the title *κωνδιδάτισσα* it is inferred that her father or

¹ Beck 1959: 519 suggests c.810 as a possible date of birth, though Rochow 1967 (who rejects the legend of the bride-show) places it earlier in the period 800 to 805.

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her husband, see below [Appendix I](#)) held the high military post of *Kandidatos* at the imperial court.

Kassia, like other girls of her privileged circle, had access to a good education,² and achieved a high degree of literacy in Greek language. She studied the Scriptures, Patristic classics – especially St Gregory the Theologian – sacred music, poetry and metre, and probably some Hellenic classics, such as Homer, though she was to expand her reading in this field later. Since girls were expected to be well equipped by their early teens, their educational curriculum covered what we might call primary and secondary studies, and usually, but not always, stopped short of higher studies in rhetoric, philosophy and the sciences. Considering that two other women poets, Thekla³ and Theodosia, the highly educated Empresses Euphrosyne, wife of Michael II, and Theodora, wife of (Emperor) Theophilos, were all contemporaries of Kassia, and considering the moral force women had shown in the contest with iconoclasm, it is clear that in ninth-century Byzantium there was some window of opportunity for women of Kassia's calibre. It was a window which soon narrowed, however, for there seems to have been a resurgence of misogynist sentiment in Byzantium from the tenth century onwards.⁴

From 726 to 843, church and society in the East were convulsed by the Iconoclast controversy in two waves. The first half of Kassia's life coincided with the second iconoclast phase inaugurated by Emperor Leo V the Armenian (813–20). In many ways iconoclasm was an attempt at a 'Reformation', Eastern Roman style. It was compounded in arguable proportions of Islamic influence, theological rationalism, political opportunism and a misguided attempt at Christian archaism. That Iconoclasm ultimately failed was due mainly to two groups in society: women – from all classes – and monks (Mango 1977: 4). It was two imperial women who did most to overthrow the impiety against icons and religious tradition: Empress Irene, widow of Leo IV (775–80), who first re-established icons in 787, and was 'Emperor' (βασιλεύς) in her own right from 797–802, and Empress Theodora, who after the death of her husband, Emperor

² The majority of Byzantine women – and men – were illiterate. On the education of girls in court circles, see Herrin 1995: esp. 76–9. Herrin (83) remarks on the quick pace of female education, which was expected to be achieved by marriageable age (post puberty): 'it is important to remember that young girls were expected to learn fast. Princesses must have matured quickly, under pressure, for they were expected to cope with important affairs of state'; see also Moffatt 1977: 85–92.

³ A single canon to the Theotokos by Thekla has survived, a work of great literary skill, with a very high view of the dignity of woman. See Eva Catafygiotu-Topping, 'Thekla the Nun: in praise of Woman', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 25 (1980), 353–70.

⁴ Though the iconodules triumphed, it seems they took on some of the iconoclasts' dispositions. See Kazhdan & Talbot 1991/92: 401–4.

Theophilos (829–842), once for all restored the veneration of icons in 843 (Diehl 1964: 65–113; Garland 1999: 73–108).

Kassia's experience of this crisis in the Byzantine church had a deep impact on her youthful character. It seems to have stimulated her to personal courage, strong ideals of Christian piety, and a high idea of Christian womanhood. While still a girl, she collaborated with the many women who resisted the edicts against icons.⁵ To take such a stance needed more than youthful high spirits; it could be dangerous, as the fate of the iconodule heroines Sts Theodosia and companions, or the Hegoumene, Anthousa of Mantineon and others show.⁶ Kassia was even something of a child confessor of the faith, being beaten for her aid to imprisoned monks and iconodule outlaws (Theodore, Second Letter to Kassia, lines 12 & 25: Rochow 1967: 21).

Kassia and St Theodore

We learn of this beating from the correspondence of the outstanding Church Father of the time, St Theodore the Studite (759–826), whom the young Kassia regarded as a spiritual hero and sought as a guide. Theodore renewed cenobitic monastic life by bringing it back to the teaching of St Basil the Great, staunchly refused the possibility of divorce and remarriage against the expediencies of Imperial and Patriarchal politics, disallowed the intervention of Emperors in church affairs – above all in doctrinal matters – insisted on collaboration with the Pope of Rome, and thought through the theology of icon veneration. He was exceptional for the number of women he corresponded with, and for the genuine respect and exchange of views he

⁵ Herrin (1983) concludes that devotion to icons was a significant aspect of feminine spirituality because of women's secluded role in society and limited opportunities in church life. It seems that the cult of saints and of icons, and generally of colour, variety and the alliance of sense and spirit in worship, provided a sphere of individuality and personal devotion of particular importance to women, the loss of which was intensely resented. It was only *ex post facto* that Sts John Damascene and Theodore the Studite reinforced the religious instincts of women and monks with theological reflection. They derived the legitimacy of icon veneration from the 'economy' of salvation, ie, 'dispensation' of the Incarnation. See St John Damascene, *On the Divine Images* and St Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*.

⁶ According to the *Synaxarion* of Constantinople 828–30, the nun Theodosia and her companions were summarily executed in 729 for interrupting the destruction of the famous icon of Christ over the Chalke gate; she became a role-model for all Orthodox women active in the cause. Anthousa was said to have been tortured under Constantine V: Topping 1981: 202; see Hatlie 1996. According to Kazhdan & Talbot (1991/2: 396) the strongest evidence for the role of women is found not so much in the *Chronicles* or *vitae* of the ninth century and later, as in the contemporary *Letters* of St Theodore the Studite.

shared with them.⁷ Gardner (1905: 169) has remarked on his 'paternal attitude, tender yet commanding towards the persons and the communities that looked to him for encouragement and guidance'. In many ways Theodore reprised in himself the spirit of the great Cappadocians, above all, of St Basil himself.⁸

In the three letters to Kassia (Rochow 1967: 20–6), a translation of which is appended to this paper, Theodore warmly commends Kassia's zeal for the Orthodox faith and traditions⁹, thanks her for aiding an imprisoned disciple of his, and at the same time praises the quality of her Greek style as remarkable for the times and for one so young. We also learn from him that Kassia had been set on monastic life from an early age, and was seeking Theodore's patronage for this aim. It is curious that while he encouraged her to continue as a 'bride of Christ', he would not quite give her his personal backing in the way that she wanted. A possible scenario is that Kassia, in her young teens in the early 820s, was in her parents' mind a potential candidate for imperial marriage. Theodore, however, wished to avoid getting caught in a three-way contest between her, himself and her parents. He held her for the present to being a virgin in the world, perhaps discerning enough strength of mind in her to weather whatever it would take, without having to be 'carried' by him.

The Bride Show

So we come to the famous story, first attested by the chronicler, Symeon the Logothete in the century following her death, that Kassia appeared in the bride-show arranged by the Empress Euphrosyne for her stepson, the young emperor Theophilos, in the year 829:

She assembled young women of outstanding beauty. Among them was Kassia, an outstandingly beautiful young woman. There was also another called Theodora. Giving Theophilos a golden apple, Euphrosyne told him to give it to the young woman who pleased him most. Struck by Kassia's beauty, Emperor Theophilos pronounced: 'Ach, what a flood of terrible things came through woman!' She replied, yet with modesty: 'But also through woman

⁷ See Kazhdan & Talbot 1991/2: 408, for a comparative survey of all letters written to women in the ninth and tenth centuries. Theodore is in a class by himself at the top of the list; at pp. 397–400 all the women he wrote to are listed, and his correspondence is discussed.

⁸ Both Theodore's and Kassia's thought are steeped in St Basil. With regard to the Cappadocians' attitude to man and woman, see Harrison 1990; Momigliano 1985.

⁹ In *Ep.* 142.19–21, Theodore asserts that men and women are equal in the struggle for Orthodoxy.

better things spring.¹⁰ Stung to the heart by these words, Theophilus passed her by, and gave the golden apple to Theodora who came from Paphlagonia.¹¹

Some scholars are sceptical about ‘bride-shows’, considering them a literary invention.¹² Others argue for their historicity (Treadgold 1975, 1979; Tripolitis 1992: xiv). At any rate these ‘Judgments of Paris’ feature in the accounts of the imperial court from 788, when reportedly first introduced by Empress Irene, to the last one for Emperor Leo VI in 882. With a caution as to Kassia’s eligibility for such a contest in her late teens, there is nothing inherently improbable in the particular episode as presented here, or that Symeon might not have tapped genuine oral tradition from the previous century.¹³ Everything about the Kassia here accords with the poet we know. Here is a woman inclined to candour and to wit, who did not consider it an option to be cowed on account of her sex – yet not from any stance of arrogance, still less of misandry, but from a Christian piety instinctively and promptly doctrinal. The theology of woman implicit in this episode is persuasive. It also appears in Kassia’s troparia to St Barbara and St Christina and is entirely characteristic of her religious thought.

It seems that in the light of her youthful zeal for monastic life, this was one contest Kassia would not have been keen to win anyway. Perhaps she went through it on sufferance to oblige her parents. As it turned out, Theophilus had only to make one misogynist utterance, and the outcome was as good as assured.

Monastic Life

At some stage after this episode, Kassia entered monastic life and undertook her first training as a nun.¹⁴ It is hard to determine exactly when. According to the chroniclers, and consistent with her intentions as found in Theodore’s second letter, she herself founded a monastery of nuns after the final

¹⁰ I try to preserve the play on words between Theophilus’ verb ἐξόύη, and Kassia’s πηγάζει. Theophilus’ reference is of course to Eve, and Kassia’s to the Theotokos. Kassia’s present tense seems to suggest that Mary’s role-reversal of Eve, as it relates to woman, is an ongoing project.

¹¹ (Pseudo-)Symeon the Logothete 625. I have adapted the translation of Topping 1981: 204. The story was repeated many times with slight variations; see Rochow, 5–19.

¹² E.g., Rochow, 10–19, who doubts the validity of the story, relying on Brooks 1901; so also Rydén 1985.

¹³ Further on bride-shows, see Herrin 1995: 66–7 (bibliography at nn.7 & 8); Herrin 2001: 312–8; Topping 1982: 200 n.9.

¹⁴ Symeon 625 states: ἡ μὲν Εἰκασία τῆς βασιλείας ἀποτυχοῦσα μονὴν κατεσκευάσεν, εἰς ἣν καὶ ἀποκειραμένη φιλοσόφῳ βίῳ καὶ θεῷ ἀρέσκοντι διετέλεσε μέχρι τελευτῆς, πολλὰ ἴδια συγγράμματα αὐτῆς καταλιποῦσα – ‘Kassia, having failed to become empress, founded a monastery’. This seems to be telescoping events and mishandling motives; cf. Georgios Monachos 790; Leo Grammatikos 213.

collapse of iconoclasm in 843. After the final defeat of iconoclasm, there was a 'rash of new monasteries' (Charanis 1971: 68). Her monastery was sited on the eastern slope of the seventh hill of Constantinople called Xerolophos, in the west of the city near the walls of Constantine. Nearby was the monastery of Stoudion (Tripolitis 1992: xv; Janin (1969) 430–40). Here Kassia guided the nuns as their *hegoumene*, or Superior. Here she composed both sacred chants and non-liturgical verse for the use of her community and circle of friends, including the monks (Symeon the Logothete 625; Georgios Monachos 790). We will consider shortly her doctrine of monastic life.

The friendship between Kassia and the Studite monks was an all important factor in her literary survival. The monks of Stoudion played a pivotal role in the re-editing of the Byzantine liturgical books in the ninth and tenth centuries. They conducted an enormously influential scriptorium, or as we might say today, publishing house, where the modern cursive form of Greek script was devised. The monks did not write the *vita* of their friend and spiritual mother. Instead, they gave her a different, and indeed a unique memorial, by incorporating a selection of her hymns into the liturgical books. They were in an unparalleled position to ensure their dissemination in the Byzantine Church.

Kassia's literary works

Manuscripts from the eleventh to the sixteenth century ascribe to Kassia some 49 hymns, of which 23 are included in the liturgical books (Rochow 1967: 32–46), and some 261 non-liturgical verses first edited by Krumbacher in 1897, which take the form of either epigrams or aphorisms called 'gnomic verse'. Bentzen concludes from a study of the hazards of transmission that 'the proportion which survives may be only a small part of her original corpus' (Bentzen 1994: 3). The quality of Kassia's literary craft is revealed by comparing her work with that of contemporary hymnographers. Their style is conventional, prolix and mannered, while Kassia's tends to originality, a simpler vocabulary and a subtler, more concise use of words. She concentrated more meaning into fewer words.

Kassia as social commentator: non-liturgical verse

The distinction between Kassia's so called 'secular' poetry and 'religious' poetry is somewhat misleading. Some of the former is explicitly religious, and in all of it her Orthodox Christian mind is never far from the surface. Hence I prefer to call this class of her verse 'non-liturgical' rather than 'secular'. In these works we come into contact with the strong personal character of a ninth-century Byzantine woman who had some mordant observations to make on the social scene of her times (Rochow 1967: 59–72).

For her non-liturgical verse Kassia uses the epigram. This is implicitly another link with Theodore, who had revived this Hellenistic and Patristic literary genre in the late eighth century. He used the iambic trimeter and simple, direct language to comment on various aspects of monastic life: Krumbacher compares Theodore's and Kassia's verses on monastic life (1897: 343). She followed Theodore's lead with two series of verses Περί μοναχῶν – concerning *monachoi* – 'monks' (which includes 'nuns' – *monachai*), and Τὸ εἶναι μοναχός – what is a monk? The verses were intended as a kind of easily remembered catechism on the nature of monastic life for the use of her nuns and perhaps her friends among the monks. She pulls no punches: the monk's life is staked on ultimate realities:

Today in the world,
and tomorrow in the grave,
the thought of death consumes life.

The monk's life is wholly theocentric or it is nothing; it is μονολόγιστος, i.e., having only one rationale:

The life of a monk is solely for the glory of God.¹⁵

As with St Benedict (*RB* 7:35) a monk quietly embraces suffering without running away:

A *monachos* is one who abides to the end,
through suffering and distresses,
though the pain be ever so sharp,
sustaining all without complaint.

Yet it is far from a matter of gloom, however, for the monk's life is the truly lyrical life:

A *monachos* is a spiritual lyre,
an instrument harmoniously played ...
such a one is always rejoicing
and celebrating a festival.

In relation to society at large, the life of a *monachos* has an exemplary, even an iconic function:

A *monachos* is a text-book,
showing the pattern, and at the same time teaching;
the life of a monk is a shining lamp for all.

¹⁵ There is an echo of St Basil here. Cf. the *Great Asketikon*, *Longer Rules* 20: Μονότροπός ἐστὶν ὁ τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ βίος, ἕνα σκοπὸν ἔχων, τὴν δόξαν τοῦ Θεοῦ. In Basil's doctrine, the monk is the Christian, par excellence.

From these statements it is clear that Kassia had a high view of the monastic life especially as it applied to women. For her, the cenobitic monastery was in no way a social refuge, but a stringent choice for a high ideal. She was expecting from her nuns considerably more than the genteel, minimally ascetic life of aristocratic women in retirement, observable in the later Byzantine period. According to Talbot (1985: 17): ‘feats of ascetic prowess were not expected from the aristocratic nuns of late Byzantium ... (the) spiritual director of the noble nun Eulogia, counselled her to avoid fasting or corporal punishments that might threaten her health. She should not take as her model the Desert Fathers, for a Constantinopolitan convent was far removed from the Thebaid, and did not require the austere regime of a Saint Anthony’.

We turn now to the second type of Kassia’s non-liturgical poems: gnomic verse. Here, pithiness was of the essence, and she shows this quality with her unvarnished observations on social mores: friendship, beauty, women, good and bad fortune, rich and poor, the Armenians, envy, stupidity, and so on.

Even allowing something for the genre, Kassia’s series of pungent *sententiae* each beginning with Μισῶ – ‘I hate’ – perhaps influenced by the aphorisms of Palladas in the Greek Anthology that also begin μισῶ—makes for bracing reading. Nothing more aroused her ire than any sign of hollowness or want of transparency. The Gospel words: *Let your ‘yes’ mean ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ mean ‘no’* (Mt 5:37) are evinced here as the soul of her character. For instance, she found the rich crying how hard up they were particularly hard to take, and several times remarks on the ungenerosity of misers. Her comments seem born of many thankless encounters:

I hate the rich man moaning as if he were poor.

Her word of encouragement for the poor is:

But one who bears poverty graciously,
In his misfortune has gained good fortune forever.

In contending with the inequities of society, Kassia may have had a personal struggle with ill-will towards the undeservedly prosperous. This is what she says in her verses on Envy (φθόνος):

Tell me most vile Envy, who bore you,
and who can smite and destroy you?
Indeed it is vainglory that bore me,
and surely, loving kindness smites me,
fear of God rends me through and through,
and humility utterly destroys me.
O Christ, till death, let me not be envious!

In her trenchant verses on stupidity, Kassia casts an all-seeing eye on the passing parade. She is not one to suffer fools gladly, especially those in power. Though it has been suggested she is referring to her rejection by the young Theophilos, it is hard to avoid the impression that she is speaking to the situation under Emperor Michael III (842–67) who came to the throne as a child, and who, in later reigns at least, had a reputation for dissolute living.¹⁶

There is absolutely no cure for stupidity,
no help for it except death!
A stupid person when honoured, is overbearing to all...
Knowledge in a stupid person is a bell on a pig's snout...
If a stupid person is young and in power,
alas and woe and what a disaster!

Showing the same forthright disposition was her disgust at anyone of chameleon-like behaviour, one who will do anything to cultivate favour.

I hate one who conforms himself to all ways.
I hate one who does everything for recognition.

So we are not surprised when she declares:

I hate silence when it is time to speak.

She is the daughter of Theodore here. When in 815 Leo V had commanded the Patriarch Nikephoros and monastic superiors to keep silent, Theodore declared to his face that in such circumstances silence would be treason. Considering the candour Theodore himself met with from her, she was an apt pupil. Still, we find in other verses, a counterbalancing mood, though here she may be specifically referring to silence from oaths:

Better to be silent than to speak what is not lawful (θέμις);
for from silence there is no danger, no blame,
no misgivings, no recrimination, no oath.

On woman, she re-expresses some of the Old Testament wisdom sayings and Palladas's epigrams in the Greek Anthology. Hers is an ambivalent view of feminine beauty – it is either an unwelcome distraction, or at best an ancillary help. Then she makes an electric utterance. Kassia has come upon a text in 1 Esdras which in every way confirmed her experience of feminine solidarity in the crisis of the Church, and accorded well with her Eve/Mary

¹⁶ Emperor Michael III (842–67) was called a chameleon and a drunkard. Kassia also wrote verses against drunkenness. For the damning character given him by chroniclers writing in the subsequent Macedonian dynasty see Steven Runciman, *Byzantine Civilization* (London: 1948), 212.

typology. She adapts the scriptural text to affirm the strength of women in alliance with truth:

Esdras is witness that the race of women
together with truth prevails over all.¹⁷

On the hazards of chastity she is very clear-eyed:

Better a fight than furtive love (cf. Prov 27:5),
for all are wary of the first,
but stray beguiled into the second.

She knows the propensity of fallen human nature to take the line of least resistance. Therefore, assiduous effort in an upward direction is necessary:

Evil is easier than good;
for the good is like a steep ascent,
but evil is more like a declivity,
and everyone knows how much easier
it is to descend than to ascend.

One of Kassia's models for gnomic verse was Menander. As he wrote on friendship, so did she. There are hints here and there that Kassia knows the rigours of periods of isolation, especially of a moral kind.

One alone who is isolated
has a double share of gloom and despondency.

She therefore sets a very high value on friendship. She experienced her friendships, true and false, intensely:

¹⁷ φῶλον γυναικῶν ὑπερισχύει πάντων· καὶ μάρτυς Ἐσδρας μετὰ τῆς ἀληθείας. Bentzen, 148, misses the full scriptural context and so translates it in a secular feminist key (250): 'The race of women dominates everything; and the witness of Esdra proves this to be true.' The text comes from the book known in the Septuagint as 1 Esdras, and in the Vulgate as 3 Esdras, not to be confused with the book Ezra of the Nehemiah-Ezra corpus. In the Rahlfs edition of the Septuagint, the exact texts Kassia glosses are: 1 Esdras 3:12, ὑπερισχύουσιν αἱ γυναῖκες, ὅτι πάντα νικᾷ ἀλήθεια (it is women who are strongest, but truth prevails over all), and 4:13 περὶ τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας (concerning women and truth). The setting is found in 1 Esdras 3–4. Three bodyguards debate before King Darius about what is the strongest. The third, Zerubbabel, asserts that women are, but since, like all else, they too are unrighteous, truth surpasses them too and endures forever: 'Blessed be the God of truth!' He wins the contest, and is rewarded with the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Kassia clearly accommodates the text, so as to say that women prevail over all – but only in alliance with truth, so to speak. It is misguided to disinter Kassia's convictions about women from her doctrinal Christian piety. Her sentiment here is very reminiscent of the old catch-cry: With Mary [the Theotokos], the vanquishing of all heresies!

Love all, but beware of trusting everyone.

In a friendship of two that is not in Christ,
Harmony is not possible, but only strife.

A friend, sharing his sufferings with his dearest friends,
finds relief from excessive distress.

A crisis will reveal a genuine friend,
who will not abandon one whom he loves.

Regard him as a friend who loves without guile;
one with guile however, is no friend but your enemy.

To sum up Kassia's non-liturgical verse, what better than her following prayer, which gathers together several of her themes:

May Christ grant me rather to endure adversity
with men (ἀνθρώποι) both thoughtful and most wise
than enjoy good fortune with irrational fools.

Such then, is the spirit Kassia instilled in her community on Xerolophos and in her wider circle, without doubt including the Studite monks. Like St Teresa of Avila she wanted not ninnies, but strong-minded, clear-eyed, women, of unequivocal piety, as her nuns.

The theologian who sings: Kassia's sacred chants

Kassia's hymns come down in two forms. There are 47 *Idiomela Troparia*, ie, short metrical hymns with their own melodies, and two *Canons*, or more complex cycles of stanzas. I follow the sequence of Tripolitis's list, but divide it into saints on the one hand, and feasts of the Lord and his Mother and entries in the Triodion on the other.

Kassia composed troparia in honour of: St Symeon Stylites, St Thekla, companion of Paul, St Pelagia the Harlot, the Edessan martyrs Gurius, Samonas and Abibos, St Matthew the Evangelist, St Barbara the Martyr, the Cappadocian martyrs Sts Eustratios and companions, 'Our Father Basil' (the Great), St Gregory of Nyssa, St Euthymios, St Agatha the Martyr, St Eudokia the harlot and martyr, St Mary of Egypt, the Nativity of the John the Baptist, Sts Peter and Paul, the prophets Elijah and Elisha, five troparia to St Christina the Great Martyr, the Holy Maccabees, and Sts Adrian and Natalia.

The preponderance of martyrs, holy women and Cappadocians may be noted.

Of other feasts, Kassia composed one canonical and eight non-canonical troparia for the Nativity of the Saviour (the canonical troparion *When Augustus was monarch upon the earth*, is considered to be her finest after the one on the

sinful woman (Tripolitis 1992: 18–19), three for the eve of Theophany or Epiphany, three non-canonical troparia for the Meeting or Presentation of the Lord in the Temple (Tripolitis 1992: 108), one each for the Annunciation and for the Dormition of the Theotokos, two for the first Sunday of Lent (Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee), and one each for Friday of the first Week of Lent, and for Wednesday of Holy Week.

Of her two canons, one was for the Easter Vigil, and one for the Dead.

Kassia's hymns are all strongly theological and liturgical in sensibility, economic yet sensitively expressive. Several themes recur: her favourite invocation of Christ as 'Saviour' (σωτηρ), the importance of tears, the 'saving of souls', the appeal to mercy, and the image of the myrrh-bearing women. Not surprising in an iconodule and disciple of St Theodore, Kassia is particularly tuned to the humility and abasement of Christ's Incarnation, and the condescension and compassion that prompted it. Repeatedly she uses the term *kenosis* (cf. Phil 2:7) – 'self-emptying' – usually with a qualification highlighting the paradoxes, eg, Christ's *divine* kenosis. Similarly, in her collection of non-canonical hymns on the Nativity discovered by Eustratiades in two manuscripts on Mt Athos (Eustratiades 1932: 102–5), she focuses on the poverty of the newly-born Saviour, as if pondering the scripture: *for your sake he became poor, that by his poverty you might become rich* (2 Cor 8:9).

It is remarkable that a canon by Kassia found its way, in part and disguised, into the heart of the most sacred Christian festival: the Easter Vigil. In the twelfth century, Theodore Prodromos, in his commentary on the work of the more famous hymnographers, says that the Tetraodion, or 'four-ode' canon for Holy Saturday, both its words and melody, was originally composed by 'the noble and wise virgin Kassia'. Georgios Monachos (790) also mentions that she was the real composer of this tetraode, but because it was not considered fitting to credit a woman with a hymn sung on such an occasion, it was attributed to the sixth-century Kosmas, Bishop of Maiouma in Lebanon, and that early in the tenth century, it was re-edited and augmented with five additional odes by Bishop Mark of Hydrous, Italy.¹⁸ This is its form in the Triodion to this day. In 1932, S. Eustratiades discovered two manuscripts at Mt Athos containing the original form of Kassia's Easter Tetraodion which he transcribed and published. Understandably, it is considered among the finest of her longer works (Eustratiades 1932: 97–100).

The canon begins with Miriam and the women singing after the deliverance at the Red Sea. So it was not unfitting that the original composer

¹⁸ Tripolitis 1992: xii, who refers to the *Anthologia Graeca Carminum Christianorum*, ed. by W. Christ and M. Paranakis (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1871), p. xlix; Rochow, 'Nr. 2: Das Tetraodion zum Karsamstag', pp. 37–40.

of this canon was a woman, and its first singers the choir of nuns at Xerolophos:

But let us like the maidens,
Sing now to the Lord,
for he has been wonderfully glorified!

Included here in full is Kassia's troparion to St Barbara, one of the more popular women saints of the East. Its theology of woman echoes the rejoinder given above to Emperor Theophilos, and is found again in the troparia to St Christina. Kassia portrays St Barbara as sharing in Mary's role-reversal of Eve. In Kassia's mind this is every woman's task in the age-old contest between Saving Mercy and Destructive Malice:

The malign Enemy,
who once gained the Fore-mother
as an instrument for sin,
has been put to shame,
worsted by a woman,
for He who was incarnate of a Virgin,
the Word of the Father,
simple and immutable,
as only He knows,
has undone the curse of Eve and Adam.
Now, having worthily crowned Barbara the Martyr,
Christ extends to the world through her
atonement and great mercy.

Similarly, in the troparion to St Mary of Egypt, we find that communion of saints in which the holiness of one saint is mysteriously generative of holiness in others:

and with streams of your tears
you watered the entire desert,
and caused to grow in us
the fruits of repentance.

For indeed, as the ending of the troparion to the Holy Maccabees asserts, God is obedient to the obedient:

and he fulfils your wishes
who stand in awe of him.

Kassia's most famous work is her troparion for *Orthros* in Wednesday of Holy week, Κύριε, ἡ ἐν πολλαῖς ἀμαρτίαις. It has often been included in anthologies of Greek and/or religious poetry (for example, Trypanis: 1971). As with other hymns, Kassia herself set it to music, so that she is properly called *Melodos*. Velimirović considered that the medieval melody preserves

the original close connection between text and music (Topping 1982: 201 n.12),¹⁹ This is essential to the 'sung theology' of sacred chant. Eva Catafygiotu Topping (1981) was the first in the Anglophone world to dedicate a study to this jewel of a hymn, and I base my observations on hers. But first I present my own free verse translation:

O Lord, the woman fallen
 into many sins,
 perceiving your divinity,
 takes up the rank of myrrh-bearer,
 and in her mourning, brings you myrrh,
 before your burial.
 Woe! woe for me! she says,
 since the night stifles me,
 a goading of passion
 gloomy and moonless,
 a craving for sin!
 Accept the springs of my tears,
 you who disperse from clouds
 the waters of the sea.
 Bend down to me,
 to the groans of my heart,
 O you who bowed the heavens
 by your ineffable self-emptying (*kenosis*)!
 With fervour will kiss your undefiled feet,
 and wipe them again
 with the hairs of my head,
 at whose sound in Paradise,
 breaking on her ears
 in the cool of the evening,
 Eve hid herself in fear.
 Who can fully trace out
 the multitude of my sins
 or the depths of your mercies,
 O Saviour of souls, my Saviour!
 Do not turn aside from me your handmaid,
 O bearer of mercy unmeasured!

Kassia focusses on the sinful woman of Luke 7:36–50, with some conflation with the anointing at Bethany of Jn 12:1–8. She recapitulates for the worshipping Church, now pausing on the brink of Christ's passion, the entire Lenten experience of μετάνοια (repentance). Using a language of psalm-like immediacy and a dense economy of words, Kassia portrays the woman's unequal struggle with the sin that entraps her, the point of crisis

¹⁹ London, 1973, III, 171–178, cited in Topping 1982: 201, n.12.

she comes to, her resolve to approach Christ, and her appeal to him. As she does so, the woman assumes the cry of a whole needy world, unable to save itself, to its Saviour.

Kassia does not bluntly call Luke's ἁμαρτωλός (sinner), a πόρνη (harlot), as do her male colleagues, yet she ably expresses her moral anguish. The paradox is that this sinner intuitively feels that the one in their midst is God – not so Simon and the Pharisees who doubted he could even be a prophet. In her coming to anoint the Saviour, Kassia assigns the woman a place with the holy myrrh-bearers, the first to learn of and to herald the Resurrection.

The poem then becomes a dramatic monologue in the person of the woman herself. 'In the words of the sinful woman Kassia unfolds the *pathos* of a troubled and contrite soul searching for salvation' (Topping 1982: 206), drawing the hearer or singer to share her exodus from the 'moonless night' of sensual captivity to reclamation at the 'fathomless abyss' of the Lord's mercies. Such a journey of repentance is possible, because through the 'ineffable *kenosis*' of the Incarnation, God has made himself present and compassionate, approachable and touchable in Jesus. In her sin, Eve had once run from him, but this woman does the opposite: in her very sin she runs *to* him, staking all on his goodness and condescension, not supposing that his purity could be contaminated by her impurity, but be its remedy instead.

Kassia's masterpiece is an exquisite hymn to the humility and compassion of Christ the Saviour of Souls. We can see that she understood from the inside what a deeply repentant spirit before God was. And we may be sure that as a poet, so also as a spiritual mother, she was concerned to foster such dispositions in others. It is shallow to suppose Kassia herself had to experience the actual sins of the woman portrayed to express such sentiments. Like any mature Christian who has gone any distance in a serious life in Christ, she has been made to measure something of her own spiritual indigence. She knows what utter contingency on the saving mercy of God is about. So it is not likely she was such an overbearing superior: direct certainly, but far from uncompassionate to those seeking the Lord, however deplorable their situation – provided only they were genuine. With Kassia, that was non-negotiable.

Conclusion

We have seen in this survey of Kassia's life and work, an outstanding woman of ninth-century Byzantium, her character forged by her participation as a child in the contest against iconoclasm, and encouraged in her youth by a great Church Father, St Theodore, and in her mature years, by friendship with the Studite monks. She had the advantage of an education that enabled her to craft both liturgical and non-liturgical poetry with consummate skill.

She was an acute and outspoken observer of the society of her time. It is rare enough even in the annals of learned women²⁰ that she did not let her talent lie idle, but put it to work throughout her life, above all in service of the Liturgy, in the instruction of her monastic community and in the encouragement of her circle of friends.

Kassia neither accepted the belittling of women, nor supposed that timidity was a necessary part of the feminine repertoire. Implicit and explicit throughout her work is a theological understanding of woman in the economy of salvation, seen in terms of Mary's role reversal of Eve. She was taught it by her Orthodox faith, it was rooted in perennial Christian tradition beginning with themes of the Gospel and the Scriptures. Such a sound Christian idea of womanhood, of course, was often lost sight of by individuals or epochs in Church and society. Therefore Kassia's survival in the Christian memory, and the respect she gained in the Greek Church is a cause for wonder and gratitude, and inspiring to us today who hope to encourage the true good of women in society and in Church.

On a final note, we draw attention to the research of scholars over more than a century, in the field of Greek hymnody in general, and in Kassia studies in particular. It is remarkable what has been recovered from manuscripts in obscure repositories. We hope for more, specially in the field of Byzantine chant. As Bentzen (1994: 164) says: 'The music remains, another realm, tantalizing and promising, which will yield its secrets in time, and in doing so, will shed more light on the hymns themselves.'

Appendix 1: the letters of St Theodore to Kassia²¹

Fatouros dates the first two letters to 816–18, and the third letter to 821–26. He discounts the bride-show episode, and assigns Kassia's birth to 800–805. I take a different view. I offer here an interpretation of the evidence dependent on a 'high' chronology, accepting all the letters as addressed to Kassia, and the validity of the bride-show.

Firstly, there is a problem in the title *κανδιδάτισση* which prefixes two of the letters. This would normally means the *wife* of a Kandidatos, and requires accommodation if it is to be taken to mean *daughter*.²² Still, the

²⁰ To take some examples: the highly literate and bilingual Melania the Elder in the fourth century, or the polished Latinists among Anglo-Saxon nuns in the seventh/eighth centuries, or Heloise in twelfth-century France, or St Thomas More's daughter Margaret Roper, composing Latin verse at 14. Apart from some letters, lost in Melania's case, what legacy of writings did they leave? Why was More's life written by Margaret's husband?

²¹ These letters in this chronological sequence are found in Rochow 1967: 20–2, and are also edited as *Letters* 217 (pp. 339–40), 370 (pp. 501–2) and 539 (pp. 813–14) in the edition of Fatouros, and as *Letters* 541, 413, and 205 in *PG* 99, cols 903–1669.

²² Theodore also addressed a Eudokia as *kandidatisse*, who was a 'secular virgin' (Bentzen: 36–37). If so, she is not likely to be a *kandidatos*' wife.

reader may judge whether it is likely that this *kandidatise* who is a ‘maiden lately sprung’ (second letter) and keen on monastic life, is likely to be a wife or a widow. It is not impossible to discern a sequence in the letters as they stand. They depict an addressee of consistent character, who may reasonably be taken to be a single Kassia – not two or three different Kassias. This correspondence is best situated in the period of iconoclast resurgence, from Theodore’s confrontation with Leo V in 815 to 821. Taking into account the bride-show and Kassia’s age eligibility at the time, and the fact that Kassia’s being beaten best fits the period of Leo’s active persecutions, which Theodore now describes as in the past (πάλαι), I propose that all the letters were written in the 820s, when Kassia was in her early teens. Perhaps she shows a character remarkable in one so young, but this is not impossible. Girls were not then beholden to the culture of protracted adolescence as in our day, and, by our standards, matured fast. St Makrina’s strength of resolve at the same age may be compared.²³ Yet Kassia seem to have been precocious and intelligent even in her privileged circle. Thus, in agreement with Krumbacher, I date her birth to c. 810–12. If a participant in the bride-show, she may have been much the same age as Theophilos, who was born 812/813.

On the hypothesis that the ‘general’ and his lady wife referred to in the third letter are either Kassia’s own parents, or, if she is an orphan, her guardians, I suggest the following sequence of events: the young Kassia, towards the end of her formal education, initiates correspondence with Theodore, well-known as a hero of the iconodule resistance and as a spiritual father to iconodule women. Having established rapport, as she thinks, she writes a second time, trying to enlist him for her resistance to her parents’ or guardians’ plans. Perhaps because of her beauty, culture and age, they wish to foster her chances as an imperial bride. She, however, was set on becoming a nun. Another factor was tension over differing religious beliefs. Kassia, as an ardent iconodule, seems to have been chafing in a household pragmatically temporizing with iconoclast policies. Theodore writes again, this time walking a fine line. He applauds her monastic aspirations, but does not give her his endorsement in quite the way she wishes. He also greets one who seems to be her mother. Kassia mulls over this slightly non-compliant reply for a considerable time. Then, evidently deciding that valour is the better part of discretion, she writes again, expressing her annoyance with him. Meanwhile Theodore has himself incurred the ire of her mother. Apparently Kassia has tried to brandish Theodore’s name with the lady, who in her turn has let him know what she

²³ This is when her resolve for virginity asserted itself, and, says Gregory, ‘her decision was more firmly fixed than her age would have warranted’: Gregory of Nyssa, ‘Life of Macrina’, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Ascetical Works* (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1966): 161–91 at 166.

thinks about his interference in family affairs. So he sends Kassia a third letter, a sterner one this time, matching candour with candour. He wisely refuses to take sides in a family dispute. He charges Kassia with inadequate motives in her domestic politicking, and recalls her to authentic Gospel love. A little less youthful hot-headedness might go far in gaining the general and his wife for full Orthodox (iconodule) communion. Meanwhile he has every intention of remaining on good terms with them, and Kassia is not to be permitted to drive a wedge between them. Theodore died not long after (11 November 826),²⁴ which surely lent force to this letter as his last testament to Kassia. She may have acceded to his admonitions, and made herself more biddable for the rest of her teens, with the preferred outcome – for her – at the bride-show as we have seen.

Finally, I remark on the difficulty of translating these letters, especially the last two. Firstly, they are not public literary epistles but private notes. Secondly, Theodore himself is a disciplined man of great interior life, always holding more in reserve than he ventures to express. He is often elliptical, terse, and allusive. For these reasons it is not easy to recover the background against which he writes. This is especially the case in the last paragraph of the second letter. Alternative understandings of the context and punctuations of the text might yield different nuances of translation at several points.

1. To Kassia Kandidatise

I have received what you sent me in the Lord. But who am I, so lowly, to be remembered by your Piety? All the same, you are sprung from a good root and you know how to do good. Indeed, I hear of your noble deeds from Dorotheos, our spiritual child, who is imprisoned very near you. Do you know what it is you do? You participate with him in the struggle of his contest. Be assured that you are supporting us too, sinner that we are, in supporting our son.

What recompense shall you have from us? Prayer and a word of encouragement. You have preferred the noble life²⁵ according to God, you tell me, from childhood. You have become the bride of Christ: neither seek nor love another. For who indeed is fairer than he? Since his beauty has flashed into your heart, you will have it in you to extinguish any fleeting and perishable longings. Flee then, flee the gaze of males – even, if proper, the gaze of those who are wise, in case you are smitten or yourself smite. You are

²⁴ It is intriguing to read in *Saint Theodore the Studite: The Testament*, tr. N.P. Constat (Washington D.C. : Monastery of the Holy Cross, 1991), 13, that Theodore ‘fell asleep ... in the year of the Lord 829’. Such a dating would be very convenient for our argument concerning Kassia and the bride-show, but is probably a misprint.

²⁵ καλὸν προεῖλου βίον διὰ Θεόν.

accepted by the Bridegroom who is in heaven. It is there you will see him to whom you belong, with whom you shall receive an everlasting dowry.

My word is brief, but enough for your honour to keep in mind. May you be saved, O maiden²⁶ of Christ!

2. To Kasia

Once more (καὶ αὖθις), your Decorum has expressed to us things so wise and understanding, that it is right for me to be astonished and give thanks to the Lord when I see such knowledge in a maiden lately sprung.²⁷ While you have not surpassed those of old, of whose wisdom and education we in this generation, both men and women, fall far short – and immeasurably so – you have done so with regard to those of the present, since the fair form of your discourse has far more beauty than a mere specious prettiness.²⁸

But concerning what you seek, that your life should run with your words, and that you should not trip up in the wrong direction.²⁹ If indeed you have already chosen to suffer for Christ in this present persecution – as though it were not enough that you were beaten in the past (πάλαι) – and again, you chafe because you are unable to endure your burning longing for the good confession, well then, may you be kept fervent³⁰ in such dispositions! For assuredly, you know that nothing is so *good and pleasant* (Ps 132:2), as to suffer for the truth, and to make more and more profit from sufferings. For gold and silver, fame and a pleasant life, and all that it seems good to have among earthly things, are in no way among the beautiful, even if so called, since such things are ephemeral and perishing, dreamlike and shadowy.

What follows then? Your choice of life as a lover of monastic life – after (μετά), as you say, the persecution ceases. Such [news] was not strange to me, even if a stranger. Why so? Because anyone can deduce the consequences from the antecedents. The verification works both ways. If there is smoke, fire will necessarily come forth. Since there is already a confession of Christ, it is clear that the life of monastic perfection should blaze forth. Blessed are you either way. Only, do not expect the laying on of

²⁶ κόρη Χριστοῦ. A young girl, in her early teens, best fits the case, since many were married and mothers by their mid to late teens. Theodore also uses the term in the next letter. A derivative noun ἡ κορεία, means ‘maidenhood’, i.e., unmarried, implicitly virginal, girlhood.

²⁷ κόρη ἀρτιφρεῖ.

²⁸ Following the punctuation of Fatouros, p. 501, lines 7–8: ὅτι μάλιστα καὶ κόσμος σοι ὁ λόγος, πάσης ἐπικλήρου εὐπρεπείας ὡραιότερος.

²⁹ There seem to be combined images here: that of life being in conformity with the ‘word’ (σύνδρομος καὶ ὁ βίος τῷ λόγῳ), and of running a course according to a goal without tripping.

³⁰ διαζέουσα – may you stay ‘on the boil’, so to speak.

my hand,³¹ since I am a sinner, but of that hand, by whose sacred administering you will be hallowed.

I send profuse greetings to her who brought you forth into the light through the fashioning of *the true light* (Jn 1:9),³² like the mother of day (cf. Lk 1: 78–79). The gifts I have received from her, along with those from you, I have dedicated to my Lord as a thanksgiving³³ and supplication on behalf of you both.

But perhaps I have overburdened you³⁴ too much; so may he *who takes away the sin of the world* (Jn 1:29) lighten you of your supposed burden.

3. To Kassia Kandidatisse

The letter of your honour was a long time coming, and it is accusatory at that: in one way displaying humility, and in another rising up against our nothingness, just as they do who hurl simply and without proof those accusations against you – and they too who are among your nearest and dearest.

But we are used to fending off such accusations, and make it clear that we listen to these bickerings as to childish games, and that we *so speak, not as pleasing human beings, but God who tests our heart* (1 Thess 2:4),³⁵ even if in other respects we are a sinner. For if Balaam the seer did not dare to answer Balak, king of foreigners, against God's will (cf. Num 22–24), how can we, who are found in the order of priesthood, and on the day of judgment shall have to render account for the answers we gave when questioned, depart in what we say from what is due?

This is the way we answered your questions, *not as from ourselves*, maintaining that this or that is the case, as you were led to say. But what do

³¹ Theodore seems to be referring here to tonsuring of the head, a rite that had long become associated with the profession of monks, and was being imitated at this period by nuns. Monastic profession, however, was not conferred by the 'laying on of hands' strictly so-called, which is a sacramental gesture referring to the sacrament of Holy Orders.

³² Τὴν ἐνεγκοῦσάν σε εἰς φῶς διαπλάσει τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ φωτὸς ὡς ἡμέρας μητέρα πλεῖστα προσαγορεύω. How does one interpret this obscure passage? On the other hand, who or what has 'brought (Kassia) into the light by the fashioning of the true light'? Her own mother? The Church? The Theotokos? Theodore seems to be verging on sacramental / mystical symbolism from which he backs off near the end with something like 'well enough of that'. The 'true Light', surely means Christ, with perhaps an allusion to the dawning of the morning star in Lk 1:78. He may be saying that he both thanks them and has prayed for them both in the Divine Liturgy. At the end, he refers Kassia and this other feminine person not to his patronage but Christ's.

³³ Or, to read it in a sacramental register, 'in the Eucharist', δῶρον ἀνεθέμην τῷ Κυρίῳ μου τὴν εὐχαριστίαν.

³⁴ ὑμᾶς, ie, a switch to the plural 'you', from the singular used in the earlier part of the letter.

³⁵ In this letter Theodore speaks very much in the accents of his master, St Basil. This Pauline text was a favourite with Basil, e.g. *Shorter Rules* 52, 184, 282.

you want then, that we answer like sellers in the market, aiming to please every comer, or that *we rightly divide the word of truth* (2 Tim 2:15)? Therefore, do not let yourself or the lady our sister,³⁶ or any one else who wishes to mock and drag us about, attack our humble self without warrant. Know that we hold no enmity with the ever-memorable general, but rather peace, as we do also with his spouse.

But we are disappointed, and rightly make a cross-accusation, that you who are indeed outstanding in knowledge, who strive after piety, are in the end not moved against him in true love, for before all and above all it was necessary that you strive after what was for the salvation of his soul, *reckoning all else as rubbish* (cf. Phil 3:8), but that he might be a participator in the holy things and be found in the Orthodox communion, since it is written: *Wherever I find you, there I will judge you* (Ez 7:3).

This then, is the way we think, and the way we speak. But if others do otherwise, they are responsible for their own utterance, but let us keep silent. *The Lord knows his own, and let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from injustice*, as it is written (2 Tim 2:19).

Appendix 2: Kassia and Hildegard of Bingen

Since the present writer has done some work on St Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179),³⁷ a few notes comparing the Middle Byzantine nun and the High Medieval German nun might be of interest.

Kassia and Hildegard were both women of high intellectual and spiritual endowment, and whole-hearted in their pursuit of a life of Christian holiness, ie. monastic life for them was not an avoidance of sexuality or male domination, but an avocation full of faith and spiritual élan. Both, of course, were pre-modern in their mentality and culture, and in Hildegard's case, it is relevant to say, pre-scholastic. Thus they lack that over-reflexive self-consciousness that came to prevail from the Renaissance onwards. There is a sturdy realism, indeed a robustness about their sensibilities, and an eminently liturgical, scriptural and doctrinal cast to their piety. Both were inclined to unvarnished speech. Both were minded to be entirely women of traditional piety: true *mulieres ecclesiasticae*, women of the Church.

The first half of Kassia's life was spent in a secular, urban and politicized setting where her character was early put to the test and matured, while the first half of Hildegard's life was spent in retirement, and only then was she tested in public engagement. Kassia is a very urban nun, familiar with the

³⁶ ἡ κυρία ἡ ἀδελφή. Fatouros supposes this is Kassia's sister, and that she is the wife of the general whom Theodore shortly mentions. If so, perhaps they are Kassia's guardians, or she is living in their household. Yet, if Theodore calls this lady his 'sister', he does not so call Kassia, which perhaps indicates a generational gap between Kassia and the lady.

³⁷ Anna Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard, the Biographical Sources* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998).

most sophisticated court in Christendom, and as a consequence uses little imagery directly from nature, whereas Hildegard is a child of the mid-Rhineland countryside, and full of its lush imagery. Kassia had the advantage over her western sister in her access to a high degree of education in Greek – both the ecclesiastical language and her own native tongue. It took Hildegard much of her life-time to achieve fluency in educated Latin, which was not her native tongue. Hence Kassia was equipped to compose ‘hymns’ strictly so-called and epigrams, written in metre, while Hildegard composed ‘sequences’ in free form.³⁸

Both knew male mentors sympathetic to women and thus had a salutary experience of spiritual fatherhood in the Church, which contributed to the emergence of their own spiritual motherhood. On Kassia’s side, the strength of character she showed from her youth needed some tempering. Hildegard’s earlier timidity, however, needed to be emboldened, and it took half a lifetime to reach her full moral stature. When her character did mature, she was no one’s lackey, and seems to have surpassed her eastern sister in the impact she had on contemporary church and society, and, as far as one can tell, the extent to which she became a spiritual mother not only to her nuns, and to monks and other men and women at large.

Kassia and Hildegard each founded a monastery of nuns, in the latter’s case two. Both were zealous for the monastic life, but far from insulated from, or slow to make pointed comment on contemporary church and society. While Hildegard does this most often in the persona of a prophetess, allegorically making an exegesis of scripture, doctrine and her own visions in her letters, sequences and theological works, Kassia can afford to be trenchant in her own person, criticizing society in her pithy maxims, and in her hymns typologically making an exegesis of scripture and tradition. Unlike Hildegard, Kassia’s piety does not show much evidence of visions or quasi-mystical phenomena, but of reflection and assimilation of religious truth in a more implicit form of religious experience.

Their most notable point of resemblance is that they both composed chants for the liturgy, though in the differing literary forms as mentioned

³⁸ ‘Generally speaking, women belonging to Byzantine high society had more frequent and easier access to education than their Western medieval counterparts’: Hero 1986: 15–16. On the other hand, at a slightly earlier period than Kassia, it was otherwise. Nuns in seventh-century Gaul and Belgium, Anglo-Saxon nuns from the time of St Hilda in the late seventh century, and nuns of the Anglo-Saxon mission in Germany through the eighth century pursued a high standard of Latin literacy, including the study of poetic metre – see, for example, the letter of Aldhelm to Abbess Hildelith of Barking, and correspondence of Egburga and St Lioba with St Boniface, discussed by Bateson 1899: 174–5, 179, 181. Most of these nuns lived in double monasteries, increasingly under the Rule of St Benedict. The subsequent decay of this monastic system in Germany, including the high degree of educational collaboration with the monks, up to the time of St Hildegard of Bingen would be worth a separate study.

above, and that they both composed the music to which the chants were set. As at Hildegard's Rupertsberg, so, at Kassia's Xerolophos, the nuns of the community were the first to sing the sacred chants composed by their Superior. Kassia's longest composition is a Canon of supplications for the dead; so also, Hildegard was known for her solicitude for the souls of the dead.

In their earthly *nachleben*, both Kassia and Hildegard found difficulty in attaining canonization. While Hildegard achieved it in a roundabout way as a 'still un-canonized neo-canonical saint',³⁹ Kassia somewhat lags behind her western sister.⁴⁰ Kassia outdid Hildegard however, in that no small number of her hymns were incorporated into the official liturgical books of the Church – but then, sacred poetry and lyric came to play proportionally different roles in the Byzantine and Western liturgies.

An interesting historiographical footnote is that the outstanding Hildegard scholar of the nineteenth century, the Benedictine monk and later Cardinal, Jean-Baptiste Pitra,⁴¹ was also a great researcher in the field of Greek Hymnography.

It would be a consummation devoutly to be wished if Kassia's attainments as a composer of sacred chant were given the same sustained attention by musicologists and musicians as is being accorded Hildegard of Bingen.

³⁹ Barbara Newman, concluding words to 'Hildegard and her Hagiographers: the Remaking of Female Sainthood', in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine M. Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

⁴⁰ Rochow 1967: 87–91 studies Kassia's cult on the island of Kasos. Manuel Gedeon in *Βυζαντινὸν ἑορτολόγιον. Μνήμαι τῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ δ' μέχρι τῶν μέσων τοῦ ἰε' αἰῶνος ἑορταζομένων ἁγίων ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει* (Constantinople: 1899), 218, records her feast day as 7th September. There was also a service and life published by M. Sassos, *Ἀκολουθία τηῆς ἁγίας ὁσίας μητρὸς Κασσιανῆς* (Alexandria: 1889), but this was not accepted as legitimate.

⁴¹ J.-B. Pitra, *Analecta Sanctae Hildegardis Opera Spicilegio Solesmensi Parata*, *Analecta Sacra* vol 8 (Monte Cassino: 1882); and *Hymnographie de l'église grecque* (Rome: 1867).



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3

Propriety, Practicality and Pleasure: the Parameters of Women's Dress in Byzantium, A.D. 1000–1200

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Introduction

Alexander Kazhdan recently observed with great justice that 'the history of Byzantine costume is still to be written and will be difficult to write' (Kazhdan 1998: 13). The prevailing picture of Byzantine clothing remains to this day highly distorted and unrealistic. The distortions stem initially from the tendency of Byzantine pictorial art to stylisation, and stylisation of a sometimes subtle kind. The effect of this factor has then been very much exaggerated by the long-standing practice of art historians of studying and reproducing only a narrow sampling of imperial and religious art, and by the lack of linguistic and art-critical skills on the part of those more popular authors who have written on the specific subject of Byzantine dress. (The only work largely devoted to this subject is Houston 1966. More encyclopaedic works treat it in a more cursory manner: Black 1978; Boucher 1987; Kohler 1963; Payne 1965; Tilke 1956.) Attention to aspects of dress in more scholarly studies have focused exclusively upon particular items of imperial or religious regalia, and so have done nothing to broaden the picture in the direction of the wider society (Kondakov 1924; Piltz 1976, c.1977, 1997. Note also de Waha 1978 who draws attention to the caution with which Piltz's work should be approached.).

A more general and accurate picture is possible, albeit with difficulty. Women are much less well represented than men in both pictorial and literary source material, and in the former are less often depicted in realistic detail.

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Sources

Literary sources offering any specific clothing terminology are rare. The most extensive is the *Book of Ceremonies* prepared by Emperor Constantine Porphyrogennetos in the second quarter of the tenth century (Vogt 1967: xxvi–xxviii). Authorities have accepted this work as being quite accurate (Toynbee 1973: 604; Cameron 1987: 118). However, a number of reservations must be born in mind when considering it for our purposes. The clothing described in the *Book of Ceremonies* is formal court regalia. Universal patterns in construction of ritual must lead us to suspect that garments and ensembles specified there would not closely approximate to everyday wear, and to wonder whether the terminology also accurately reflects current usage. Circumstantial evidence from other sources supports these suspicions. Yet the *Book of Ceremonies* does, none the less, yield valuable information when these observations are kept in mind.

The *Dream-book* of Achmet (Achmet 1925) is another quite extensive source which gives us an insight into usage close to, if not concurrent with, the *Book of Ceremonies*.¹ One potential reservation in reading Achmet should be laid to rest; that is, that he was himself originally Persian and many, if not most, of his dream scenarios and interpretations are carried over explicitly from Persian tradition. He wrote in Greek and worked within the Byzantine empire, and he explicitly declares himself to be a professional Oneiromancer. As such, the saleability of both his services and his book would have been compromised by anything which would have been too incomprehensible to his Greek readers and patrons. Hence we can take his references to dress very largely at face value.

Beyond these we must cast the net wide for scattered hints. Wills and donation documents can be very useful,² especially in counter-balancing the more famous works of the eleventh century by Psellos, Komnene and Skylitzes, which neglect, or even studiously avoid, giving us such useful details and so will be rarely referred to here.³

Pictorial sources present a rather more complicated issue. The sweeping dictum espoused by Cyril Mango (1981b: 50) that ‘Nearly all Byzantine painting that has come down to us is religious in content and is based on the faithful reproduction of iconographic formulas that can be traced back to the

¹ In the notes to his original dissertation translation Oberhelman (1981: 64) placed the *Oneirokritikon* between 813 and the eleventh century. His published edition (1991: 14) narrows the date down to the tenth century.

² Helpfully surveyed by Oikonomides 1990.

³ Psellos and Komnene are as one in consistently employing ἐσθής, σχῆμα or στολή whenever either wants to refer to a main garment, and πέδιλον for footwear, which in any case is never anything but imperial. On the subject of such ‘Atticism’, see Hunger 1969–70; Horrocks 1998.

early Christian period. It is worthy of note that in depicting such stereotyped compositions Byzantine artists carefully avoided any intrusion of contemporary costumes or settings: Christ, the Apostles, the prophets appear in antique garb'... is a distinct oversimplification. It does remain true of the core figures of religious art, yet even works which show the most rigid stylisation on those central figures can reveal remarkable pieces of realism as our view moves towards the edges. Hence, for example, realism is quite commonly present on the marginal figures and impedimenta of the Nativity. A similarly misguided assessment appears in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (3.2203, *sv* Women), describing the illustrations of women and their dress from the seventh to eleventh centuries as 'sexless' and 'parodies of human form'. This view is indicative of perceptions based far more on modern prejudices and preferences than upon an appreciation of the broad range of medieval dress in its own context. In so far as it has some element of truth, two factors must be taken into consideration. One is that it is equally true of aristocratic men's clothing with its loose pull-over *tunica talaris* and enveloping ankle-length *chlamys* of the formal wear normally depicted. The other consideration is that in a society much poorer than we can readily comprehend, most people owned very scanty wardrobes by comparison to the modern world, and in a time prior to effective contraception, any dress in that scanty wardrobe of an adult (and therefore normally married) woman had to be capable of accommodating a full term pregnancy. Even so, alongside such cloth-swathed figures, one often finds women depicted with their feminine form as well displayed as it realistically would have been within the generally practised tailoring of the time.

One place where a high degree of realism is the norm is in donor images. It was evidently important for the identity and status of donors to be easily recognisable to the viewer. So in addition to captions, donors were commonly depicted in their regalia, if they were entitled to it, or else in their 'Sunday Best', but plainly in their real contemporary clothing. Nor are illuminated works of secular literature as rare as Mango's assertion would have us believe, and they give us some invaluable information for this study. Nevertheless, Byzantine art cannot ever be said to entirely free of conservatism, and as a 'Rule of Thumb' we can take it that whenever any point of detail appears in a pictorial source, it has probably been well established in daily life for at least a century.

The two largest and most familiar illuminated manuscripts demand specific mention.

The first is the *Menologion of Basil II* (Bib. Vat. Gr. 1613). Made in the first decades of the eleventh century, this compendium of martyrology has 450 lavishly illustrated pages. At first sight the suggestion is of great realism, yet comparison with other pictorial material of the tenth and eleventh

centuries and literary sources such as the *Oneirokritikon* and *Book of Ceremonies* reveals a subtle stylisation based upon a delicate blend of selected contemporary realism, mild antiquarianism which harked back, not to Late Antiquity, but rather not much more than a couple of centuries, and a measure of racial stereotyping which glossed over the multiculturalism that actually prevailed on the streets of Constantinople.

The second is the illustrated manuscript of Skylitzes in the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid. It is nowadays accepted as dating to c. 1150 (Wilson 1978), and it has been persuasively argued that this manuscript is a novel creation produced in the court of Norman Sicily, and, furthermore, that the group of illuminators who worked on it seem to have been of mixed nationality according to their styles: even those working in a highly Byzantine mode may never have been to Constantinople (Ševčenko 1984). I would go further and suggest that some of the models the illustrators worked from for details they were not so well acquainted with could themselves have been a century or more old.⁴ In any case, where women appear in the Madrid Skylitzes, their dress can be corroborated from other reliable sources of the tenth to twelfth centuries.

Garments: Headgear

A basic headscarf had been an essential part of a Near Eastern woman's wardrobe since time immemorial. Terms for this are numerous; *kamelaukion* (καμελαύκιον), *kalymma* (κάλυμμα), *velarion* (βηλάριον), *maphorion* (μαφόριον) and others, and most are used interchangeably, not only for headgear, but just as often for any draped textile covering, from the cloth over the liturgical vessels on the altar, to an awning.⁵

Maphorion is the term with the nearest to a technical meaning. Achmet employs it as a specifically feminine object (Achmet 1925: 216), while in contrast it appears in the *Book of Ceremonies* as an item worn by both sexes.⁶ A white *maphorion* is part of the regalia of a *koubikoularia*, and it is notable

⁴ A clear illustration of this is the very strong similarity in the military scenes of the Paris 'Book of Kings' (Bib. Nat. Paris, Gr. 333) of the eleventh century (Lassus 1973). The proposition is further supported by the details of military equipment and the resemblance Madrid Skylitzes depictions bear to descriptions in later tenth-century military manuals. For some details of how military equipment changed in the tenth to twelfth century, see Dawson 1998 and 2002. There are other reasons for doubting the suggestion that it was copied from a single Constantinopolitan prototype: see Ševčenko 1984: 127 sq.

⁵ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies*, ed. Reiske 63, 73, 130, 163, 181, 595: καμελαύκιον as an awning in church; applied to men's hats: Achmet, section 216, p. 168; velarion as an imperial awning: Achmet, section 260, p. 214; kalymma as various sorts of coverings: Achmet, pp. 115, 214, sections 155, 259.

⁶ *Maphoria* are prominently associated with the rank of *raiktôr* (*Book of Ceremonies* 529), as well as the *zostê patrikia* (p.258) and *koubikoularia*.

that the male equivalent of the rank, the *koubikoularios*, does not share this item, even though the other main component of their regalia, the *sagion* (σάγιον q.v.), is identical (Constantine Porphyrogenetos 1837: 622–4). The precursor of the term *maphorion*, the Latin *mafors*, evidently had a distinct meaning as a hood, rather than a draped headscarf, and it is this characteristic which feeds through into its use as formal regalia quite distinct from a common item.⁷ The late twelfth-century *Eisiterioi for Agnes of France* shows the *maphorion* as being a stiff drape below the hat, with a gap under the chin in a form almost certainly unchanged since the ninth and tenth centuries.

At the end of the eleventh century the *kouropalatissa* Kale Pakouriane bequeathed no less than 29 headscarves (*velaria*) to her freed slaves, two or three to a recipient, in addition to their familiar garments, personal items and peculia, which she settled on them *in toto* (Lefort et al. 1990: 180–1). Most of these *velaria* were cotton (*vamvakaron* / βαμβακήρον), the others fine silk. The term used for the latter, *chasdion* (χάσδιον), is cognate with the Arabic *khazz*, a highly valued stuff often referred to in Arabic sources. *Khazz* turbans, described as ‘soft, thin stuff’, were associated with the city of Kufa (Serjeant 1972: 32), but *khazz* quality silks woven as brocades were a notable import into Islamic countries from Byzantium (Serjeant 1972: 61, 72–3, 117), so plain *chasdia* are likely to have been manufactured locally. The silk *velaria* were all blue, while of the cotton ones, green predominated, followed by white, blue and rich purple (*alethinos* / ἄληθινός). In this document *velarion* is evidently equivalent to *maphorion*, for more than one of the recipients is male.

Various eleventh and twelfth-century manuscripts show a few women sporting an attractive fashion. Their veils are very fine and transparent and underneath they wear a close-fitting cap which ranges from a plain colour with a contrasting band, to a patterned fabric with a highly decorated band (see line drawings, figure 4).⁸ The practice of wearing a cap under the headscarf is quite likely to have also been employed by poorer women, with their heavier headscarves concealing the evidence for it.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries there was the beginning of a trend for head scarves to be worn in greater lengths (see plate 2).

⁷ The Edict on Prices of Emperor Diocletian mentions hooded tunics: *dalmatikomaphortion* / δαλματικωμαφόρτιον (Frank 1959, vol. V, pp. 371–381 passim). The spelling is quite variable.

⁸ Vat Gr. 1613 f. 98 and elsewhere; Vat Gr. 746 f. 49r; Brit. Lib. Add. 40731 ‘Bristol Psalter’ f. 93r.

The padded head-roll, so much a feature of fashionable late antique women's dress,⁹ and so widely preserved in middle period art which harked back to that era, was long out of fashion by our period. Its role as heavier headwear had been taken by the turban (*phakiolion* / φακιόλιον), which survived throughout this period. Turbans were generally more mundane in their use and are often to be seen worn by Imea and Salome, the women washing the infant Jesus. Figure 2 shows such a mundane turban with the paired transverse stripes which were standard to them. Yet women of a higher class could also wear ornate ones at times, such as the example with gold symbols (φακιόλιον ἔχον χρυσὰ γράμματα) bequeathed by Kale Pakouriane at the end of the eleventh century after she had entered a monastery (Lefort et al. 1990: 179). A turban worked with transverse bands and geometric patterning can be seen finely rendered on a donor portrait of the third quarter of the twelfth century in the Church of Saint Nicholas of Kasnitzi at Kastoria (Pelekanides & Chatzidiakis 1985: 58, pl.21).

The twelfth-century trend for very long hanging ends can be seen in turbans as well as headscarves (Nativity, Church of Panagia Arakiotissa at Lagoudera, Cyprus: Stylianos and Stylianos 1985: 165).

At an uncertain date, but no later than the early eleventh century, a style of head-dress came into use which was related to the turban, but wrapped in a distinctive manner. Whereas a turban is wrapped in a figure of eight sequence around the head producing a criss-cross arrangement in the visible areas, this newer type was wrapped circularly in the same plane with a cloth carefully folded longitudinally. The method produces the effect of a low cylinder (figure 3). Such a head-dress may be wrapped with the inner end covering the head and falling as a short flap down the back, as in the well-rendered example from a twelfth-century manuscript in Plate 1 (Koutloumousiou Monastery, Mount Athos, codex 60 f. 1v), or else bound as a simple cylinder over a separate headscarf, a manner described allusively by Michael Psellos in the combination of 'antique hood and tower-like binding around it' (χοηδέμων καὶ ἀμφιδέσμων πυργώματα) worn by his daughter, Styliane (Psellos 1876: 73). By the end of the twelfth century it may well have been the most prevalent head-covering for Constantinopolitan women. Niketas Choniates says that during the sack of the city crusaders put them on their horses (Choniates 594). The implication of this is that by that era, the head-dress was sewn to shape, since soldiers of the Fourth Crusade would hardly have bothered, or even have known how, to wrap them.

This head-dress is better represented in Armenian art, even in sources which otherwise show Byzantine style and dress ('Gladzor Gospels', Uni. of

⁹ Most famously illustrated on Theodora's ladies in the mosaics at Ravenna, and represented by a fine surviving example from the burial grounds of Egypt held in the Textile Museum, Lyon. Inv. No. 47555/3.

California Reserved Library Arm. MS. 1 ff. 263, 438; Walters Gallery, Baltimore MS. 539, f. 66r; Freer Gallery MS. 32.18 very extensively), and is also well known from the Islamic world, both in art, and in literature by the term *ʿisāba* (Stillman 1972: 128–39; Racknow 1943, pl. 6). To find some hint of a Greek term for this we must follow the same curious circular path suggested earlier in relation to the term *chasdion*. A similar consonantal root to *ʿisāba* yields us *sabanîya*, a cloth noted by medieval Arabic writers as being imported from ‘Armenia’, sometimes a misdirection for Byzantine territory, specifically for use as head-cloths and veils (Serjeant 1972: 64, 67). The resemblance between *sabanîya* and the well attested Greek term *savānion* (σαβάνιον) has been noted by previous scholars, with Dozy (1927, quoted in Serjeant 1972: 64, n.24) speculating that the Arabic was derived from the Greek. However various other explanations for the term and sources for the cloth have been offered by early Arabic authors (Serjeant 1972: 64 nn.24, 111, 149), and it seems more plausible that the term was adopted into Greek, even though the fabric, like the *chasdion* silk discussed previously, was manufactured within the Byzantine region. *Savānion* is used to refer to a number of different items in sources of our period. It appears regularly in the *Book of Ceremonies* as part of the regalia of the eunuch *protospatharioi*, yet there is no precise indication there of what it is. It might indeed be a variety of cape, as Achmet tells us, writing, as usual, of a man (Achmet 1925: 115). Equally it could be a napkin (an item crucial to the iconography of nobility in this era), as it seems to be in the *Treatise on Imperial Military Expeditions* (Constantine Porphyrogenetos 1990: 108, 214–15). Another of Achmet’s dream scenarios discussed a man wearing one ‘like a woman’, evidently intending something different (Achmet 1925: 218). I suggest that here he means a head-dress of this type, for a dream need not necessarily match reality, and in any case this head-dress is known to have been originally worn by men in the Islamic world (Stillman 1972: 128). If Oberhelman’s more recent dating for Achmet’s work is to be accepted, it puts this form of headwear in the tenth century, closely contemporary with the other uses of *savānion* mentioned above.

One substantial hat called *propoloma* (προπόλωμα) was in use from at least the tenth century, and probably earlier, as regalia for all the ranking women of the court from the common *patrikiai* to the incumbents of the highest non-imperial female rank of *zoste patrikia* (Constantine Porphyrogenetos 1837: 214, 218, 258, 623). There are no positively identified depictions in the ninth and tenth century, but they become common in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹⁰ Its construction is very simple: a deep, truncated cone of felt having the edge sewn shut into a flat

¹⁰ Bib. Marc. Gr. 822 f. 1v; Vat. Barb. Gr. 372 f. 288v; (Vat. Gr. 1851 passim); Bib. Vat. Gr. 752 f. 449v; Evangelist School, Smyrna, Codex B. 8, p. 74 Vat. Gr. 1851, ff. 3v, 6v.

arc and the truncated end folded up into the closed cavity. It was then covered with silk and decorated in wide variety of ways (plates 7 and 8). These hats were usually white, but Miriam and her ladies dancing wear purple ones, probably indicating that they are members of the extended royal family. By the late twelfth century the paired and tripled stripes on the *propolomata* shown in the *Eisiterioi for Agnes of France* (Vat. Gr. 1851) appear to have become formalised into symbols of rank, with horizontal bands being superior to diagonal bands, and perhaps three bands superior to two, although this is less clear.

Younger and perhaps unmarried women are often shown with their hair uncovered, and, slightly less often, wearing fine diadems.¹¹ Figure 6 shows one of the simplest styles of these diadems, while others had a filigree rondel or Y emblem, or both, standing up on the front. More rarely a woman is seen wearing such a diadem over a sheer headscarf (Madrid Skylitzes, f. 85r and elsewhere).

Cloaks and mantles

In late antiquity the essential cloak for both sexes was the *paenula*, a modified half circle, woven to shape and partially sewn to form a hood (Granger-Taylor 1982). The conventional Orthodox icon depiction of the Virgin preserves the look of this garment well beyond the temporal and physical bounds of the empire. The sheer practicality of such a cloak for excursions in heavy weather (snow in Constantinople is far from unheard of) argues for its survival, although secular evidence is scanty. The ‘articles of clothing woven in a single piece’ which Eparchal regulation forbade for export in the tenth century may have included such cloaks (Lopez 1945). The *Menologion of Basil II* contains frequent depictions, both as secular (f. 4, and c) and monastic (f. 98, and c.) garb.

An article of greater elegance was the *mandyas* (μανδύας). Ancient writers tell us that it was derived from Persia (du Cange 1958: 866). One, Cyril of Alexandria, asserts it was particular to women, although I think we should understand this as meaning in Byzantium, from the way it is treated in pictorial sources. Consistently through the ninth to the eleventh century a very particular type of cape is shown on men in Persian contexts. It is a semi-circle with a contrasting edge, and sometimes rounded corners, fastened with a large, often rectangular broach in the centre of the chest and

¹¹ Bib. Marc. Gr. 540, f. 7r (905 CE); Bib. Marc. Gr. 881, f. 12v (eleventh-century); Bib. Vat. Barb. Gr. 372, f. 97v, 248r (eleventh-century); Bib. Vat. Gr. 1947, f. 146r (eleventh-century); Bib. Vat. Gr. 1162, ff. 39v, 41r, 161v, 164r (eleventh-century); Madrid Skylitzes, passim; Bib. Vat. Gr. 746, f. 76r, 152r, 154v, 194v (twelfth-century).

falling generally to mid-calf (plate 9).¹² In the eleventh century these capes begin to be shown on Byzantines, usually women,¹³ but otherwise clerics or eunuchs.¹⁴ Plate 1 illustrates the difference between a woman's *mandyas* (right) and a man's cloak (*chlamys*, *χλαμύς* left) with its *tavlion* (τάβλιον) panels and broaching on the right shoulder.

The numerous *mandyai* of Kale Pakouriane include lavish items; one purple with pearl-work (...τὸν μανδύαν τὸν ὀξὺν τὸν ἔχοντα τὰ μαργαριτάρια: Lefort et al. 1990: 179), another of red silk with gold bands running down it (...τὸν μανδύαν μου χάσδιον τὸ κόκκινον τὸν ὄντα μετὰ καταβατῶν χρυσοναρθήκων, *loc. cit.*), a third of dark-green silk (...τὸν μανδύαν μου τὸν χάσδιον τὸν μαυροπράσινον, *ibid.* 80), while others mentioned in passing were presumably plainer.

The *sagion* (σάγιον) was a shorter, thigh to knee-length cape, originally military, which is best known in this era as an element of court ceremonial regalia. Several *sagia* are listed in the will of Kale Pakouriane. The descriptions suggest a generally more utilitarian item: a blue one (βένετον); a goat-hair *sagion* with columns of symbols (τὸ αἴγειον τὸ ὄν μετὰ ναρθηκῶτῶν γραμμῶτων: Lefort et al. 1990: 180), and a wholly-dyed, double fleece cape (δίμαλον ὀλοβάμματον: *ibid.* 181).

Although the garment called 'sea' (*thalassa* / θάλασσα) is recommended as an imperial gift (Constantine Porphyrogenetos 1990: 110), and makes one appearance amongst the wardrobe of Kale Pakouriane, it remains somewhat mysterious. The Continuator of Theophanes (1838:19) informs us that it is a variety of another ancient military mantle, the *aetos* (ἄετός). One explanation offered, suggesting that the lightness of the garment causes it to ripple like waves, is hardly plausible (Sophocles n.d.: 85). It is much more likely that it refers to a patterning on the cloth, sea-wool (mentioned in the *Edict on Prices*; Tenney 1959: 379, 385) or shot silk as Haldon theorises (Constantine Porphyrogenetos 1990: 222), or alternatively *ikat* cloth, which was produced in Yemen in the tenth century and earlier, made of cotton dyed shades of blue, brown and white which could certainly look like sea waves (Kuhnel & Bellinger 1952: 88, 89, 91; Serjeant 1972: 123, n.8. Golombek & Gervers 1977: 96–9).

¹² For some typical instances, see Kosmas Indikopleustes, f. 114v; Kludov Psalter, f. 64r; the Magi in the Nativity of the monastery church of Hosios Loukas near Delphi; repeatedly in the Menologion of Basil II, Bib. Vat. Gr. 1156 f. 245r.

¹³ Menologion of Basil II, f. 98 and c.; Bib. Vat. Gr. 1156, f. 279r; Bib. Vat. Gr. 746, Donor; Koutloumoussiou Monastery, Mount Athos, codex 60, f. 1v; Madrid Skylitzes, f. 85r and c.

¹⁴ Famously, the attendants of Nikephoros III Botaneiates in Bib. Nat. Paris, Coislin 79, f. 2r; Bib. Nat. Paris Gr. 580, f. 2v; Bib. Vat. Gr. 746, passim (clerical). It is also referred to in Niketas Choniates (216) as an emblem of holy orders.

Main Garments

Despite the variety which can be observed in pictorial sources in our period, the terminology for women's main garments is remarkably absent. In view of the tendency for identifiable terms for other types of garment to be non-gender specific, we might surmise that names for some men's main garments were carried over.

If this is true, then the basic main garment, a floor-length tunic with close-fitting sleeves to the wrist and a high, round neckline (plate 10), should have been called by the term first seen in a text of the mid-tenth century and continuing in use until the present day, *roukhon* (ῥοῦχον, McGeer 1995: 26). Another term surviving into modern times, *hypokamis(i)on* (ὑποκαμίσ(ι)ον), is also quite prevalent, both for this pattern and as a generic expression for a tunic, which could be modified with an adjective (Achmet 1925: 88, 115, 168, 179). Such garments are shown throughout the period, and, indeed, to the end of the empire for women of all social classes but the highest (see plate 1).

These dresses are frequently depicted as plain, although that is mostly a concession to conventional ideal modesty. When decorated they bear some combination of a yoke, a band more or less encircling the upper sleeve as in the Islamic *tiraz*, cuffs and hem bands. The *Menologion of Basil II* quite often shows *clavii* and *segmenta* on the skirts and shoulders as an artistic antiquarianism.

In the tenth century women of the more affluent classes begin to be commonly shown wearing a somewhat different dress which largely supplants the *hypokamision* in the eleventh century but goes out of fashion somewhat in the twelfth century. It is distinguished by voluminous sleeves falling from the armpit which increased over time, reaching a span of as much as around 80 centimetres at the wrist in the eleventh century. The necklines for this dress are usually high and round like the other form of dress (figures 1 and 2)¹⁵ with a V-style bearing contrasting or highly ornate lapels and a substantial falling collar behind the neck being confined to women of higher court circles in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (reproduced in plates 7 and 8).¹⁶

¹⁵ Bib. Marc. Venice, Z 454, f. 1v (serving women); Bib. Vat. Gr. 1156, f280v; Bib. Vat. Barb. Gr. 372, f.288v; Bib. Marc. Venice, Z 479, ff. 20v (a woman out hunting.), 62r (serving women); Bib. Nat. Paris, Gr. 74, f. 187r and c.; Bib. Vat. Urb. Gr. 2, f. 19v; Bib. Nac. Madrid, Vitr 26–2 f. 85r, 124v and elsewhere; Bib. Vat. Gr. 746, f. 86v.

¹⁶ Bib. Marc. Venice Z 454, f. 1v (Helen of Troy); Bib. Marc. Venice Z 479, f. 62r; Evangelist School, Smyrna, Codex B.8, p. 74. The best known example of this is the circle of women dancing from Bib. Vat. Gr. 752, f. 449v. This neckline is also well illustrated in men's tunics of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The *Book of Ceremonies*, in describing the elevation of a *zoste patrikia*, gives the term *delmatikion* (δελματίκιον) which must refer to this type of dress, since it appears that the sense of the antique *dalmatica* has been preserved (Constantine Porphyrogenetos 1837: 257, 622–3, 632–3). Alas, in the source where one might have been most optimistic of finding a term for this dress, the will of Kale Pakouriane, the author avoids any such expression, using the generic *himation* (ἱμάτιον) instead. In some cases it seems that Pakouriane perhaps employed a non-specific term because she wanted her legatees to make a choice from her evidently rather extensive wardrobe. For example, she writes ‘...(for) Helen Diaxeni... one dress and one cloak from amongst my best clothing’ (‘Ελένη τῇ Διαξενῇ... ἱματίων ἱμάτιον ἓν καὶ μανδύαν ἓν τῶν κρειττόνων). Similarly for Christina: ‘...a dress and cape from amongst my best monastic garments’ (ἱμάτιον καὶ μανδύαν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐμῶν τῶν καλογερικῶν – in fact, this is secular property: the editors conjecture that *καλογερικῶν* is a scribal error for *καλοσερικῶν* but did not correct the edition (Lefort 1990: 180). Yet in other cases Pakouriane uses the same word when a particular garment is meant: ‘my orange samite dress’ (...τὸ ἱμάτιόν μου τὸ ἐξάμιτον τὸ κίτρινον: *ibid.* 179) and ‘my green mulham dress’ (τὸ ἱμάτιόν μου τὸ μολχάμ τὸ πράσινον: *ibid.* 181).¹⁷ These items were probably sufficiently identifiable that no further information was needed, and so we are still left uncertain as to whether there was a precise expression for this type of gown.

It should be noted that while this dress (the *delmatikion*) primarily applies to women of such a class as not to be doing manual labour, their servants are also quite often shown wearing them, with the sleeves pulled back and tied together behind to keep them out of the way (see [figure 2](#) and [plate 3](#): Bib. Vat. Urb. Gr. 2 f. 19v; Bib. Marc. Z 479, f. 62r).

Another word which refers to a main garment is *sphiktourion* (σφικτούριον), also spelt *sphinktourion* (σφιγκτούριον), which appears as a recommended gift in the *Treatise on Imperial Military Expeditions* and in the testament of Kale Pakouriane. Various theories have been canvassed for this, mainly relating it to the verb *sphingo* (σφίγγω), ‘to bind tightly’, and referring it back to a late antique garment called a *strictoria* (Constantine Porphyrogenetos 1990: 222) and *sphingker* (σφιγκτήρ, du Cange 1954: 6.613). These connections are tenuous and speculative. There is also a distinct gap between the late antique use of those terms and the earliest surviving middle Byzantine use of *sphinktourion* in the *Narratio de Sancta Sophia*, noted by Du Cange and attributed to the late ninth century. I

¹⁷ Although not recognised by the editors in their notes, (Lefort, Oikonomides & Papachryssanthou 1990, p. 177) mulham (μολχάμ) is a well-known textile in the region; a compound with a warp of silk and weft of, usually, either cotton or linen. See Serjeant 1972: 214; Stillman 1972: 23, 85.

venture to suggest another hypothesis. It is that the later use of *sphinktourion* should in fact be related to the Slavic *szyta*, perhaps with some assimilation to, or recollection of, the earlier terms. A *szyta* at this time was a tunic which opened down the centre-front to the waist, or a little beyond, fastened with numerous buttons (Tkach 1986: 18, 35, [figs. 3, 15](#)). This word survives in modern Ukrainian as a coat. There is a thirteenth-century example of this garment in the Mevlana Museum in Konya (Inv. no. 691).

There appears to be no identifiable depiction of this garment in its original form in female use in Byzantine art, although there are clear Armenian depictions (Talbot-Rice 1967: 155, pl. 142). But it appears sporadically on men (Bib. Vat. Gr. 746, f. 334r; Madrid Skylitzes, f. 220r), and a fashion derived from it is frequently shown on women, and less often on men from the tenth century. This fashion is that mentioned above, in which the sides of the opening are turned out to form lapels and a falling collar attached at the top ([plates 7 and 8](#)). A Persian coat of the tenth century with this collar arrangement is held in the Textile Museum in Washington (Inv. no. 3.116), although unfortunately it was disassembled in 1948 in order to show how the figured cloth used was woven in a single piece and the original form is now only to be seen in photographs. [Figure 3](#) shows a short *sphinktourion* with the short sleeves which are commonly illustrated on all sorts of garments in the twelfth century. Here the buttons are attached on the outside, but it is equally feasible to attach them on the inside, as some of the illustrated male examples must have been. In that case the opening is scarcely visible and perhaps more easily ignored by illustrators committed to depicting a more conservative conception of what was 'truly Byzantine'. A dress opening in this way must have had vast practical advantages for a nursing mother.

Kale Pakouriane bestowed one purple *sphinktourion* (...τὸ σφικτούριον τὸ φουφούδιν τὸ ἀληθινόν...; the meaning of φουφούδιν is lost), although since the recipient was male it probably belonged to her late husband, rather than being her own. If she owned any herself they may have fallen under the umbrella of those unspecified *himatia*.

Main garments are routinely depicted as being worn pouched over a narrow belt throughout the period. In practice a long garment will tend to work its way through such a belt as the wearer moves until it hangs straight unless otherwise restrained. Therefore, while there is no specific evidence for it in either literary or pictorial sources, it is highly probable that the practice known from Turkish custom by the eleventh century of attaching belt-loops (*çirgu-y*, Clausen 1972: 428) to a robe or coat to support the skirt and allow less hindered movement of the upper body, was already well-established in Byzantine dress as well. This practice would have only

applied to plain belts, for anyone wearing a more ornate belt would naturally have wished it to be seen.

Undergarments

Undergarments are a relatively straightforward matter. An under-tunic (*esophorion*/ἔσωφόριον) of fine linen was standard wear for all but the most impoverished. The ubiquitous form was the close-sleeved style, which could be worn under any of the main or additional garments. There was also a type with voluminous sleeves to match the wing-sleeved dress (*delmatikion*) discussed above.

From the tenth century pictorial sources reveal a feature of *esophoria* unique to Middle Byzantium. It is a standing collar-band which shows well above the neckline of whatever dress is being worn. An unrecorded and only recently published garment survives showing just this feature (Dawson 2003). It is a man's shirt, most probably from the second half of the eleventh century, on display in the Manazan Museum, in the Tashkale Province of Turkey. The Manazan tunic has an applied panel covering the opening which allows the head to pass, as is commonly illustrated in many pictorial sources of this period and occurs in surviving examples showing Byzantine influence (such as the white tunic of Roger II of Sicily: Schatzkammer, Vienna, Inv. no. X1117), and this differs from what is likely to have been the practice for the equivalent women's garment. [Figure 7](#) shows the overall pattern of the Manazan tunic, with the alternative openings which are likely in women's dresses and chemises. 'A', running down the line of the left shoulder, is a placement employed in late antiquity which is known to have survived into our period.¹⁸ 'B', running down the centre of the chest, is a ubiquitous pattern across Europe and Western Asia, with what are probably the earliest examples in women's dress being Sassanian (Harper 1981: 123; several of the V. and A. tunics have this opening: Acc. nos. T66–1925, 357–1924 and T94–1924). 'C', running down the chest from the left side of the collar, is the same as the standard opening for Byzantine men's tunics, and occurs in women's dress on the margins of the Byzantine world at the beginning of our period (Ierusalimskaja 1996: 160, figs. 16 & 17, pl.19). A deep opening for 'B' and 'C' (the latter occurring in the Caucasian finds) would have been employed to facilitate nursing.

¹⁸ A few of the late antique examples: V. and A. 459-1889; Vatican Collection Pfister 1308 and HAL 12 and 30 from Zenobia: see Laufray 1951. For a medieval example, see Burnham 1971: 11.

Additional garments

Forms of coat, the ancient garment of Persia, began to come into Roman use in late antiquity.¹⁹ By the end of the ninth century they were so completely assimilated into Roman dress that they were known by purely Greek terms, the noun *diakoptes* (διακόπτης, Constantine Porphyrogennetos 1837: 582) and adjective *diakoptos* (διάκοπτος), where other features of the garment were deemed more significant (for example, *diakopton kontomanikion*, Constantine Porphyrogennetos 1837: 296, 296). In the conservative milieu of the tenth-century court the *kavadion* (καβάδιον) was redolent of barbarian associations (Philotheos: 179, 209), despite its ancient connection with Persia, which ought otherwise to have given it some cachet. In common use, however, *kavadion* supplanted *diakoptes* for this type of garment in the tenth century (McGeer 1995: 12). Despite their age and ubiquity, *kavadia* do not re-appear in Middle Byzantine art until the eleventh century, at which point they are seen as often on women as men. The figure of Salome in the centre of [plate 2](#) from an eleventh-century nativity scene (Kiliçar Kuskuk. Chapel 33, Göreme, Cappadocia) shows a fine example of a V-neck *kavadion* in pale grey brocaded with white rondels and with russet trim. Such a *kavadion* might otherwise have been fastened with conspicuous frogging (Bib. Vat. Gr. 746, f. 257r, also v-neck).

An eleventh-century manuscript shows what might be taken to be simple dresses with an odd quirk of decoration: a contrasting band running down from the left side of the collar to the hem (Bib. Vat. Gr. 1162 ff. 16r, 38v, 57r, 149r and 161v). In fact this represents a *kavadion* with the opening offset ([fig. 5](#)). Such offset openings occur in late Sassanian *kaftans* (Harper 1981: 123; Pope 1930: vol. 4, pl.166), a surviving coat of the eighth century from the Caucasus (Jeroussalimskaja 1978: 183–211; 1996: 151, no. 139, Tafel LXXIII, Abb. 196), and rarely in later Byzantine art (such as the portrait of Alexios V Mourtzouphlos: Vind. Hist. Gr. 53 f. 291v).

From late antiquity, tunics and coats often had an opening in the armpit. This may have begun as a method for easing an area of high stress, but soon the opening was made large enough to accommodate the arm. The initial mention of this in our period is in the military armour coat (*kavadion*, McGeer 1995: 12) and surcoat (*epilorikion*, ἐπιλωρίχιον and ἐπλουρίχιον, McGeer 1995: 34), but it becomes a feature of later versions of this garment, even those worn at court, by the fourteenth century (Pseudo-Kodinos 1976: 219). [Figure 5](#) illustrates this fashion. Although this picture is taken from the

¹⁹ A few examples of depictions: an Alexandrine pyxis of the sixth century in the British Museum (M&LA 79, 12–20, 1); a Lombardic ivory in the Bargello Museum (Brunelt–Denon collection 19c); four surviving coats from Egypt dispersed to collections in Europe: see Benazeth and Dal–Pra 1993: 367 sq and Fluck and Vogelsang-Eastwood 2004. For a general survey, see Gervers 1973.

earliest depiction of this style in the late thirteenth century,²⁰ its adoption into civilian use began probably in the later tenth century. Eleventh-century practice retains the term *epilorikion* for this garment in both civilian (Lefort et al. 1990: 179) and military use (Mavrogordato 1963: 6.736) in order to distinguish it from the common type of coat, the *kavadion*.

A unique portrait in one of the manuscripts of the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri suggests another uniquely Byzantine development of the *kavadion* which possibly commenced near the end of our period, but which Byzantine sources themselves do not show until much later. A full-page painting of a concubine (Bib. Nat. Paris, MS. Arabe 3239 f. 151r) shows her in a coat with wing-sleeves similar to those standard for Byzantine women's dresses, as discussed above. If this woman is not herself a Byzantine taken as a slave, then this must be a fashion borrowed from the empire, for this sleeve style is completely unprecedented for Islamic dress at this time and had fallen out of European fashion at least half a century earlier. In contrast, not only did the wing-sleeve style survive in Byzantine use to the end of the empire, but we have explicit cases of it being grafted onto other types of garment, such as the jackets of the various couples depicted in the Lincoln College *Typikon* and elsewhere,²¹ and a cross-over coat worn by Theodora on the Chrysobull of Alexios III of Trebizond.

In Achmet's dream book there is an entire section devoted to the *zoupa* (ζούπα). This is a cognate of the Arabic *djubba*, a garment which showed a exceptional diffusion into other cultures in this period. The nature of the garment which goes by this term seems to have diversified since the Middle Ages, when it was a short jacket, as is attested both by Achmet's statement that 'the *zoupa* is worn on the upper part' (τὸ ἐπάνω φορεῖσθαι τὴν ζούπα, Achmet 1925: 177) and a German *Chanson de Geste* of c. 1200 where a cape is described as reaching only to the belt like a *juppe* (Goddard 1973: 144). The *juppe* (or *jupe* and *jupon*) begins to appear quite often in European literature from the second half of the twelfth century, beginning as a military garment associated with Muslims, then moving into civilian use, whilst retaining a military sense.

The literary sources are unanimous in telling us that a *zoupa* might be made in a wide range of qualities, from fine silk which might be richly embroidered, to heavy wool. Achmet writes of wearing *zoupai* for inclement weather, cold, rain or dew, and this, along with the military uses, suggests that *zoupai* could be padded.

²⁰ Kupferstichkabinet, Berlin, MS. A 78 f. 66v. This sleeve arrangement, but on pull-over tunics, is also in the Queen Keran Gospels of the same era (Armenian Cathedral of St James, Jerusalem MS. 2563, f. 380).

²¹ The female donor of the icon of the Virgin Hodegetria in the Tretjakov Gallery, Moscow.

Byzantine painting of the eleventh and twelfth centuries represents *zoupai* surprisingly often for a ‘foreign’ garment. It is not surprising for both artistic and cultural reasons that such depictions are mostly to be found in provincial areas, notably in Cappadocian donor portraits (Thierry 1963: 42–4, 64–7 and fig. 9; Thierry 1974: 5–22, esp. 8 and figs. 9, 10; Jolivet-Levy 1991: 95; also shown in a metropolitan source on a Bulgar: Bib. Marc. 881 f. 33r.). [Plate 3](#) shows Salome pouring water for the infant Christ’s bath wearing a *zoupa* that is either sleeveless, or has wing-sleeves which are tied behind along with those of her under-dress (Nativity, Church of St. Nicholas tou Kasnitzi, Kastoria, northern Greece).

Accessories

The basic belt (*zone*/ζώνη) was leather, narrow, generally no more than fifteen millimetres wide, and short: a superfluous end is never seen hanging below the pouching of the dress. Many buckles have been found showing a strong preservation of style and decoration from late antiquity throughout the Middle period (Davidson 1952: 270–3, pls. 113–5).

The diminutive, *zonarion* (ζωνάριον), was also used widely for an item worn by both sexes. Implicitly it was something more ornate, being sometimes associated with royalty (Constantine Porphyrogenetos 1837: 423, 582). Those belonging to the empress were ‘wedding belts’ (νυμφικά ζωνάρια). In late antiquity these were made of embossed gold disks, joined at the front with two larger discs bearing a representation of Christ blessing the married couple (Kantorowicz 1960). In the conservative milieu of the court these undoubtedly retained their earlier form, but do not tell us much about more commonly used *zonaria*. A portrait of Solomon in imperial garb in the Monastery of Daphne probably depicts a *zonarion* of the more usual type, for it shows two ends of a belt hanging below the pouching of the tunic, decorated with terminals having triplets of pearls or cloisonné enamel drops, suspended from them. Similar but simpler examples occur sporadically (Brit. Lib. Add. 40731, f. 7v; Madrid Skylitzes, *passim*). That there are two ends showing indicates that this is not a common buckled leather belt, and is possibly made of a textile band, such as a tablet-woven braid, or heavy cord, and tied in place. Reliefs of wealthy citizens of Palmyra wearing Persian dress show just such cord or tape belts tied in what is today called a ‘reef knot’ with the two ends tucked through the belt and hanging in the very manner shown in Middle Byzantine pictorial sources (Stoneman 1992: pls. 16, 19).

The *Kleterologion* of Philotheos gives the word *valtidion* (βαλτίδιον) with a description of a belt of red leather decorated with precious stones (ζώνη δεγματίνη κόκκινος ἐκ λίθων τιμίων κεκοσμημένη, Oikonomides 1972: 95). Belts heavily ornamented with metal had been used in Persian dress since

the Sassanian era (Harper 1978; 1981, *passim*), and cast pieces possibly for such a use were found in Corinth (Davidson 1952: 306, pl. 125). Philotheos is speaking, of course, of the ceremonial dress of certain male dignitaries, but it is very likely that women would also have made use of such adornments when they could.

From ancient times *zosmation* (ζωσμάτιον) referred to a specifically feminine form of belt. It is likely to have been made of some sort of textile, but firm evidence is lacking. Circumstantial support may be found in the fact that an eleventh-century example was green, a colour which is not likely to have been obtainable on leather at the time (Lefort et al. 1990: 197). The embroidered sashes in [figures 3](#) and [7](#) and [plate 7](#) may be examples of *zosmatia* (Bib. Vat. Gr. 752, f. 449v; the Bamberg Silk; Bib. Marc. Gr. 540, f. 12v).

Art offers various other examples of items to which the above terms may have applied. Sashes tasselled at the ends occur in ninth-century manuscripts (Bib. Vat. Gr. 699, f. 51v), and the *Menologion of Basil II*. The latter, and an eleventh-century psalter in the Vatican (Bib. Vat. Barb. Gr. 372, f. 249r), show some examples of wider belts decorated with plaques which may be identified with *valtidia*. The *Kynegetika* of Pseudo-Oppian (Bib. Marc. 881, f. 20v) depicts a woman wearing a sash fringed along its length.

Purses (περσίκια) are illustrated only rarely in Byzantine art; in fact I know of no such depiction which occurs in the period of our study. However, this should not lead to the idea that they were not used. Literary material from within our period and those few cases when they are identifiable in art from both before and after our period explain this by showing that the ideal, if not normal, practice was to have them co-ordinated with the garment with which they were to be worn (Constantine Porphyrogenetos 1990: 110). They were made of the same fabric, and might be adorned with the same decorative motif. Purses were either a flat, rectangular flap-pouch which hung over the belt (Nave of the Church of Saint Vitale in Ravenna), or a drawstring-type made of cloth, or by the technique of sprang (Collingwood 1974: pl.26; Bib. Nat. Paris, Gr. 543, f. 288v).

It is also extremely likely that sashes would have been used as purses, either by items being tucked into the folds, or by having pockets sewn into them.

Footwear

Written material across our period rarely yields any terminology for common footwear beyond the venerable *hypodemata* (ὕποδήματα) and *sandalia* (σανδάλια), terms which are entirely generic by this time.

Achmet seems to draw a distinction between *sandalia* and *hypodemata* (1925: 178, 198–9), without giving any clear indication of the difference. *Sandalia* are evidently diverse; they come in a wide range of materials and colours, and may have a lace (ὁ ἱμάς). It is significant that this is singular, rather than plural as it ought to be if a sandal in the modern sense is meant, for Byzantine sandals had a thong or lace which ran from the sole between the big and second toes around the heel and back to its beginning, with further thongs joining the main one to the sole on each side beside the ankle. Such an arrangement also does not allow much scope for the use of various materials or colours. Hence, the distinction may be between *sandalia* meaning shoes, which are diversely represented in both art and archaeology, and *hypodemata* meaning boots, which are very much less variable.

Two vernacular terms are recorded in a tenth-century military manual as subsets of *sandalia*: *mouzakia* (μουζάκια) and *tzerboulia* (τζερβούλια), and are distinguished in the source from high boots for which no other term than *hypodemata* is given (McGeer 1995: 12). No further information is forthcoming about the former; *tzerboulia*, however, appears also in *De Administrando Imperio* as a colloquial expression for ‘slaves’ shoes’ and ‘cheap footwear’ (Constantine Porphyrogenetos 1967: 152). Sophocles (n.d.: 1355) offers the opinion that *tzerboulia* are a latch-shoe. He presents no support for this notion, but it is possible, for latch-shoes are sparsely represented in the *Menologion of Basil II* and may be a relative novelty which were more common than the subtle antiquarianism of that manuscript concedes.

Archaeology has endowed us with riches in respect of footwear. The late antique cemeteries of Antinoë and Achmim-Panopolis in Egypt yielded an astonishing range of gorgeous items. The rustic sandals – so much a stock-in-trade of Middle Byzantine illuminators depicting religious scenes – are still present, but are already well on the way to being supplanted by the variety of shoes and boots which were standard wear in the Middle period and beyond. [Plates 5](#) and [6](#) show representative examples (after Frauberger 1895: pls.13, 25). [Plate 5](#) shows a very fine half-calf boot in red with yellow appliqué, just as worn by 20 per cent of the women represented in the *Menologion of Basil II*. [Plate 6](#) (top) shows a low, laced shoe originally dark-brown or black identical to those worn by ten per cent of the women shown in *Menologion of Basil II*, while the slipper with a pointed flap on the upper at the front in [plate 6](#) (bottom), appears very rarely in the *Menologion*. Figure 8 is a type of slipper which was ubiquitous throughout the Near East in our period of study. This particular example was excavated from a site in the Gulf of Aqaba (Dawson 1994: 2–5), but is indistinguishable from those worn by the majority of women in the *Menologion* (52 per cent). Several other types of shoe known from the Egyptian burial grounds and shown less often in the *Menologion* became fashionable in Europe in the period following this

study (Grew & Neergard 1988: figs. 18, 19, 30, 41, 44, 46), suggesting, therefore, that these styles may have had a resurgence of popularity in Byzantium in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

In late antiquity the normal construction for all types of shoe and boot was to have the upper in one large piece, relying on the suppleness of the leather for a comfortable fit. This method may well have survived into the middle period for lighter dress shoes and boots, while depictions of boots for heavier wear are pieced in sophisticated ways, some of which are still in use today (Amiranashvili 1971: 72–3; Alpago-Novello 1980: 58; Evans & Wixom 1997: 159).

It is notable that, although for men footwear in shades of red to purple were expressly reserved for imperial use, red is slightly more often the colour of women's footwear in art than all the other colours (brown, black and gilded) put together. Much of the footwear from Byzantine Egypt was extensively decorated with tooling, appliqué and embroidery. We can infer that such practices survived into our period from the fact that brightly coloured (ἀνθόβαφος) and elaborate (περίεργος) footwear were specifically excluded from the picture of *pro forma* modesty painted by Psellos of the reformed prostitute his mother fostered (Psellos 1876: 27)

Occupational and recreational dress

The great majority of the labour and recreation that women in Byzantium engaged in took place in specifically assigned women's quarters either in the home or workshops, and would have required nothing out of the usual in clothing. The ubiquitous, close-sleeved *rouchon*-style dress permitted most forms of work, and there are certainly numerous illuminations of women spinning and weaving dressed in this way (see, for example, Greek Patriarchate Library, Jerusalem, MS. 5, f. 234v). The somewhat fuller sleeves we see on some garments could also be rolled up to cope with messier activities like cooking or washing (see [plate 2](#)), and, as we have seen, hand-me-down *delmatikia* could accommodate manual labour by having their large sleeves tied behind the wearer's back ([plate 3](#) and [figure 2](#)).

An occupation which certainly did have particular styles of dress associated with it was that of professional dancer. Depictions of dancers in the latter part of our period show a high degree of consistency which probably reflects the reality, albeit a reality which embodies classicising references. One primary garment of dancers was a sleeveless robe of variable length. In antiquity such a garment was called a *kolovion* (κολόβιον), but long before the tenth century that type of garment in male use had been merged with the wide-sleeved *delmatikion*, carrying the old term with it in court use (Constantine Porphyrogenetos 1839: 80, 374 and elsewhere; du Cange 1968: 272). However, while recounting an episode in which Emperor

Maximian ordered such garb to be put upon Sts Sergios and Bacchos, Symeon Metaphrastes draws our attention to the fact that in the tenth century, when he was writing, the female *kolovion* was of a form distinct from the male one (Kazhdan 1998: 14). Since the *delmatica/delmatikion* had been basic female dress since late antiquity, this suggests that the sleeveless form had carried on the name in women's clothing. If the impression given by art is correct, and this form of *kolovion* was particularly associated with *choreutai*, then Maximian's slight upon the saints would have been doubly effective, arraying them not merely in women's clothes, but in those of a disreputable profession. Some dancers are shown in more licentious manner with a *kolovion* as their sole garment and their arms bare (Bib. Marc. 881, f. 12v), while others wear a light chemise, often well decorated, underneath a shorter *kolovion* as illustrated in figure 6.²² Where their top garment has full sleeves or half-length sleeves, this layering of a shorter garment over a longer one is the dominant motif (Bib. Vat. Gr. 394).

Another characteristic which distinguishes dancers' dresses is a widely flaring portion below the main part of their top garment. These are usually in a contrasting colour and may indicate a much fuller underskirt constrained by a closer fitting, shorter over-dress, or, as the sources suggest more strongly, a ruffle pleated onto the main garment (plate 11: Khludov Psalter, f. 35; Bib. Marc. 881, f. 12v; Hermitage Museum, Inv. no. w 72; Bank 1985: pl. 217). The theatrical utility of this is clear enough. When the dancer swayed and spun, the lower portion would flare out emphasising the movements for dramatic effect; and, in more salacious contexts, it might give a glimpse of her lower legs, while the tighter portion would restrict it to a suggestion rather than an exhibition.

Universally dancers in illustrations of this era wear simple fillets over their hair as in figure 6, and almost always have broad belts with a circular fastening.

Social and moral aspects of dress

That women of the Byzantine upper classes led a cloistered life is a commonplace of recent Byzantine studies (Kazhdan & Epstein 1985: 99–102). In so far as it is true, the privacy of women's lives exempts much of their wardrobe from considerations of propriety, leaving it much more determined by considerations of practicality and pleasure. One aspect of this is how fitted women's garments may have been. The great majority of pictorial sources tend to show women's dresses as being quite loose. This is

²² The principal source for this picture is the Bamberg Silk. This piece is somewhat anomalous, for it depicts an emperor being crowned in triumph, though the fact that the women involved are barefoot indicates that they cannot be 'princesses' as Houston claims and misrepresents in her redrawing (Houston 1966: pl. V and p. 149 sq).

fully in accord with conventional morality, and is likely to reflect the reality of much ordinary dress. However, scholars have hypothesised tight garments in connection with various words found in the literature (see the discussion on σφικτούργιον above), and the pattern given in figure 7 can be made very fitted. Such fitted garments would conventionally have been considered scandalous if seen in the public sphere, but an ample cloak is a ready solution, and in more private circumstances somewhat different rules might apply. The clothes of the dancing ladies of Bib. Vat. Gr. 752, f. 449v are certainly well shaped.

For women of those classes for whom daily labour was an inescapable fact of life, any considerations of ideal modesty inevitably had to be traded off against practicality, surely to the detriment of propriety.

The one area in which a convention of propriety is documented for aristocratic women of the eleventh century is a little curious to modern minds. Anna Komnene makes much of the claim that the graceful gestures with which her mother accompanied her speech only showed her hand to the wrist and never beyond (*Alexiad* 3.3.4; Leib 1.112; Sewter 110). With the *delmatikion* in particular, the cuffs readily tend to fall away from the wrist, so Irene Doukaina's modesty must have required some practice and skill, which Komnene implies other women did not necessarily cultivate. Such a convention could only be applicable to women of leisure – for it would have caused an intolerable encumbrance to any form of labour, and, of course, is explicitly contradicted by the pictures showing working women with their sleeves tied behind them.

The assertion has been made that 'women venturing out of door carefully veiled their faces' (Kazhdan & Epstein 1985: 100; Garland 1988: 371–2). This is a difficult issue. A significant part of the problem lies in sorting out the terminology, both in English and Greek. The English 'veil' (likewise the French 'voile') has always been used so vaguely that nothing useful can be read from it for the purposes of the discussion. As we saw in the discussion of headgear, there is a very diverse terminology which basically denotes head coverings. A headscarf may be used to cover the face in moments of drama, and we certainly see references to this in various sources (for example, Achmet 1925: 77). Many types of headscarf may also be arranged to simultaneously cover the face on a more routine or prolonged basis. Terms specifically denoting face veils do occur in Greek. *Prosopidion* (προσωπίδιον) occurs in the Hellenistic era in a very precise description of the custom of Theban women by Heraclides. It was supplanted later by *stomomanikion* (στομομανίκιον), according to Koukoules (1955: 5.48). Koukoules collects a range of references which could relate to veiling, although it is not always certain that what is intended is the covering of the face, rather than just the hair. Most of Koukoules's citations are to

prescriptions made by religious authorities, yet despite the collected sources he ultimately concludes that veiling was not the dominant practice (Koukoules 1955: 4.393). Various episodes in the copious literature of the eleventh and twelfth centuries have been translated as indicating veiling. Garland refers to a moment in the funeral of Michael Psellos's sister saying his mother 'raised her veil'. In fact, this passage can be better taken as Psellos stressing that the funeral was the first time his mother had ventured out of the privacy of her home ('This time was the first occasion my mother was out in public, having disdained the gaze of men': Psellos 1876: 30). In his *Chronographia* Psellos's excursus on beautiful women contains the phrase 'concealing garments' (τὰ ἀφανῆ περιβλήματα: 7.87; Renauld 2.135) which has also been translated as 'veils' (Sewter 1966: 327) without good reason, for there is no indication of what is being concealed – face, hair or figure. More explicitly, there is the case of the prostitute whose reform Psellos's mother sponsored. 'Her eyes were cast down, her face always covered in shame, and she kept her head under cover' (τό τε γὰρ ὄμμα κατήνεγκε καὶ ξύμπαν τὸ πρόσωπον αἰδοῖ κατεκάλυψε, θείοις τε προσήει ναοῖς καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν εἶχεν ὑπὸ καλύπτρῳ) Yet Psellos then goes on to say that if 'someone saw her suddenly she blushed' (καί, εἴ τινα ἴδοι ἐξαπινάίως, εὐθὺς ἡρυθραίνετο: Psellos 1876: 27). Two observations may be drawn from this account. First, it is a commonplace that a person reformed of any vice is normally more assiduous in reaction than a person who not been exposed to vice. Secondly, even with her enhanced sense of shame, this woman could still be found with her face uncovered in a somewhat public situation. An episode in the *Chronographia* when Empress Eudokia fled rebellious soldiers (Psellos 7.29; R 2.165; S 359). The latter incident says no more than that Eudokia unwound a covering (*kalymma*) from around her head before going in search of refuge. The implications of this are far from clear. She may have then used this *kalymma* to cover her face in disguise, or it may have been a particularly recognisable item she wished to discard, yet one would imagine that her main garments might be recognisable enough. Komnene commonly mentions *kalymma* ('covering') in connection with women's headgear, but, as noted above, this term is so vague a meaning that we cannot draw any specific implication from it.

One passage in the Alexiad is commonly adduced in support of the practice of veiling. It does indeed unmistakably refer to covering the face, but I believe its implications have been overstated (Anna Komnene 2.5.3–7; L 1.76–8; S 83–6). Anna Dalassene and other Komnenian women had sought sanctuary one evening in St Sophia, concerned about the consequence of Isaac and Alexios's departure from the city in their revolt against the government of Botaneiates. The wife of Isaac joined them the next morning, and Anna says explicitly here that a veil (ὀρόνη) covered her

face, which she removed to speak to envoys. By that time their whereabouts were known, and officers had been sent to detain them, so it is as likely as not that Isaac's wife adopted the veil to disguise her identity and pass the guards. On the previous evening the party had gained entry to the church on the pretext of being 'women from Anatolia' who wished to pray before departing home with purchases made in the city, and it is possible, albeit neither clearly stated nor clearly implied, that women in the earlier party had also been veiled.

This account does not, in fact, offer us reliable evidence that women of the Byzantine aristocracy routinely went veiled; very much more evidence would be necessary to establish that, evidence which is conspicuously lacking. Anna's tale merely informs us that veiling was accepted in the cosmopolitan society of Constantinople. The most interesting and thought-provoking implication of this whole incident is that Constantinopolitan society accepted that a party of women might travel to the capital from the countryside to shop, unattended by supervisory males. We can be sure that the party had male servants or slaves with them, managing the mounts and carrying torches and so on, but they cannot be considered a substitute for fathers, husbands and brothers who were elsewhere – a situation somewhat at odds with an image of Byzantium as a relentlessly patriarchal society.

The picture presented by the sources in fact very much parallels what can be seen in al-Islamiyya across its history (Dawson 1994). Women and communities of more religiously conservative disposition did practice veiling, and that practice was accepted as being familiar and 'normal' in the inclusive culture of Byzantium. Women of less conservative inclination might also avail themselves of the practice for one reason or another (it should be noted that veiling can be as much a cosmetic protection as much as a moral one), but it was not the dominant norm for urban women of average religious observance and average social respectability.

Conclusion

An attempt to penetrate the distorting lenses of artistic and literary stylisation suggests that the dress of Middle Byzantine women was a richer tapestry than has been previously appreciated.

Where domestic or commercial labour was a necessity simple clothes which offered no impediment prevailed – close-fitting sleeves, or ones which could be rolled out of the way. For those women whose trades were public, a neatly fashioned headscarf could satisfy the most exacting demands of traditional propriety without causing obstruction, while later in our period and in more relaxed social milieux, a well-pinned or sewn turban or *savonian* would serve just as well. Some well-established garments like the *zoupa*,

sphinktourion, *kavadion*, and one style of *esophorion* might also do good service to nursing mothers.

It could well be said that working women were of necessity in a sense freer than those of the nobility, whose dress choices were probably somewhat more constrained by the demands of their status, even when not formally determined by participation in the ceremonial life of the court. Yet such women were better able to pursue the pleasure of clothing, acquiring dress in more opulent fabrics and greater diversity, and adorned with more intricate décor. Nevertheless, poorer women surely pursued the pleasures of dress as well as their means allowed. For such, a sole, or favourite dress might spend its life as a work in progress, gaining embroidery little by little as time permitted. More modest indulgences could take the form of a new *kalymma* in a bright, fresh colour, or with some applied decoration.

The wardrobe available to the women of Byzantium had a generous range of garments and styles to choose from, well able to address the demands of practicality, the pursuit of pleasure and the limited requirements of propriety.



Fig. 1 A Protospatharissa as donor in her 'Sunday best' – a brocaded dress, gold-edged mandyas and savanion.



Fig. 2 A servant with the sleeves of her hand-me-down delmatikion tied behind her.



Fig. 3 A fashionable twelfth-century outfit of a savanion and sphinktourion / makhlamion



Fig. 4 An unusual form of the kavadiion.



Fig. 5 A young, unmarried woman wearing the civilian version of the epilorikion.



Fig. 6 A dancing girl's stage costume comprising a kolovion over a decorated roukhon.

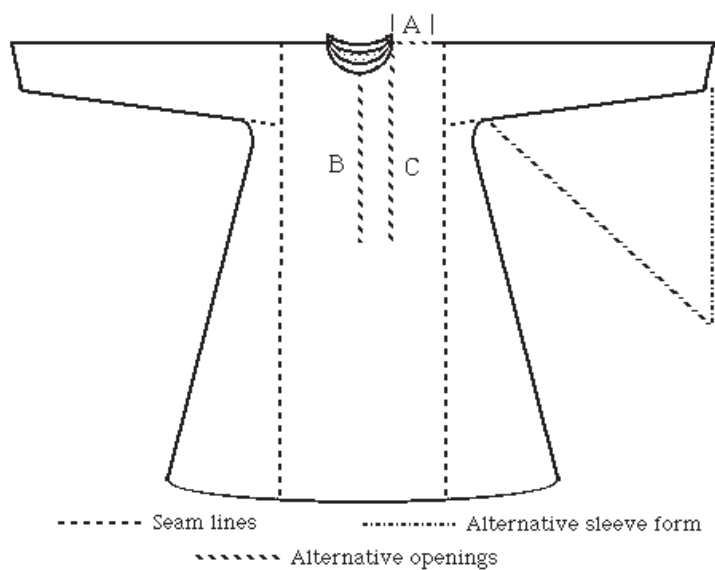


Fig. 7: Combined *esophorion* and *himation* pattern employed in the reconstructions, based upon the Manazan Caves *esophorion*.



Plate 1: Detail of donor couple of Protospathariate rank presenting the manuscript to Christ. Koutloumousiou Monastery, Mount Athos, Codex f. 1v, first quarter of the twelfth century.



Plate 2: Nativity detail, fresco, Kiliçar Kisluk, Chapel 33, Göreme, Cappadocia, eleventh century.



Plate 3: Nativity detail, fresco, Church of Hagios Nikolaos tou Kaznitzi, Kastoria, twelfth century.



Plate 4: Head of donor, fresco Kiliçar Kuskuk, Chapel 33, Göreme, Cappadocia, eleventh century.

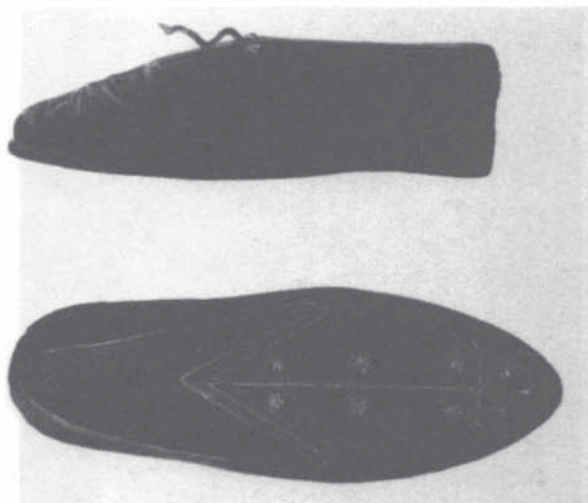


Plate 5: Shoes from Egypt, sixth century. After Frauberger.



Plate 6: Woman's red leather boot trimmed in gold, Egypt, sixth century.
After Frauberger.



Plate 7: Slipper from 'Pharoah's Island',
Gulf of Aqaba, late twelfth or early thirteenth century.



Plate 8: Reconstruction of the dress of a mid-eleventh-century noblewoman, based principally upon Vat. Gr. 752, f. 449v.



Plate 9: The outfit comprises a *propoloma*, *esophorion*, *delmatikion* and *zonarion*.

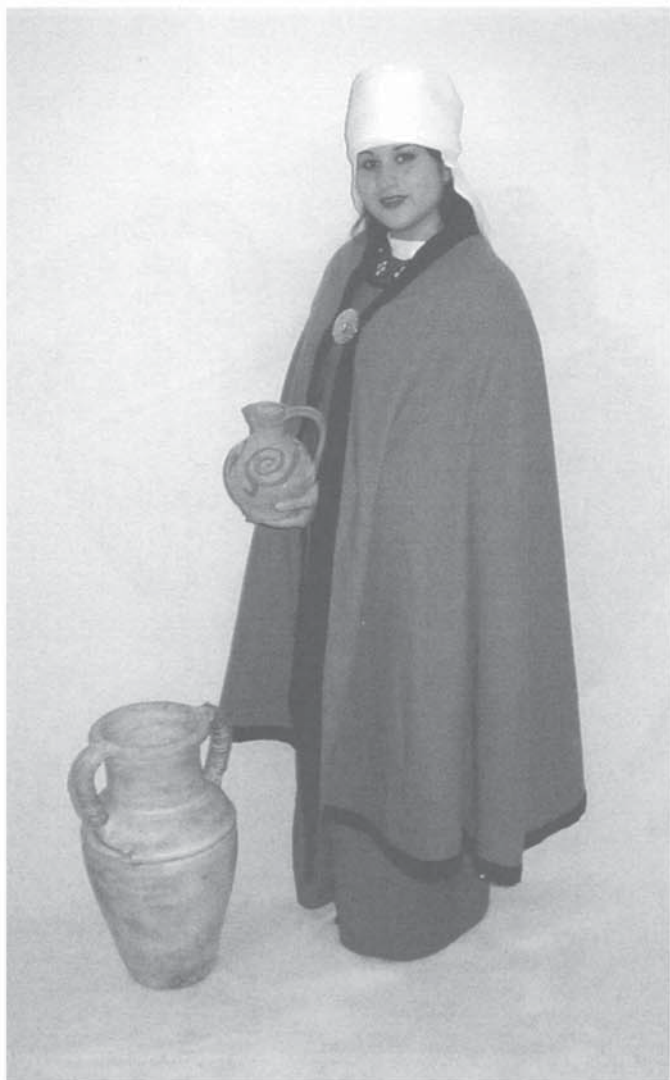


Plate 10: Reconstruction of the outdoor dress of a common woman, tenth to twelfth centuries.



Plate 11: Detail of the simple *himation* or *roukhon* of the previous outfit.



Plate 12: Reconstruction of the flounced *kolovion* of an eleventh-century *Choreutes* based upon Bib. Marc. Z 479, f. 12v.



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Taxing Sophronia's Son-in-law: Representations of Women in Provincial Documents

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One of the perennial difficulties in understanding Byzantine women lies in differentiating the authorial posturing and rhetorical idealization of our sources from information about what women actually did. The lives of some provincial women can be partially illuminated by legal and fiscal documents such as testaments, sales and donations of property, dispute settlements, taxation assessments and various other written declarations. These texts were written to facilitate potentially contentious transactions like taxation, transfer of property and the establishment of obligations. While they were not intended to be read for pleasure or edification, it is quite inaccurate to think of them as devoid of rhetoric and ideologically driven representation. All of them involved creating representations of provincial society and some of them followed conservative legal forms enshrining ancient attitudes. Most of the texts display an ideology in which women were properly subordinate to men and hidden from public affairs. Yet women were participants in all of the transactions mentioned above and so these texts provide valuable testimony to the public activities of women. The following paper examines a group of documents from the tenth through twelfth centuries, loosely categorized as legal or fiscal, with a view to learning something about both the activities of provincial women and how their representation in these documents reflects attitudes about women's roles and abilities.

Even terse administrative documents such as tax registers were texts written by authors whose goals in writing informed their representations. While the ostensible purpose of Byzantine taxation rolls was to let the tax collectors know who owed what, these documents had other roles that are at least as interesting. The Middle Byzantine taxation registers were objects

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that augmented authority of the imperial agents who created and used them by displaying imperial omniscience and control over provincial society. Through their representations of provincial society in centralised taxation registers imperial officials made statements about the order, *taxis*, of society and the subordination of communities to imperial control. Given this ulterior purpose of the records, it is worth looking not only at who owned what, but how inspectors chose to present provincial society; for our purposes particularly provincial women.

A unique representation of provincial society has survived in the eleventh-century taxation register known as the *Cadaster of Thebes*. The remaining fragment is so unclear in its assignation of individual tax burdens that its primary purpose may have been to facilitate taxation by impressing citizens (Neville 2001: 32–43). In his edition, Svoronos assigned each taxpayer's entry a number signifying its order within its section and subsection in the register: Ia1 to VIa2 (Svoronos 1959: 11–19). Individuals were described in this register with some combination of personal names, family names, geographic epithets, titles, offices and relationships to other individuals. There is little pattern to these descriptors and it seems that the assessor simply used whatever he thought was sufficient. For example a first and last name, a nickname and a place of origin described 'Leo Choulios called Moroleon from Anysou' (IVa1 and V f10). The *proedros* Sisinos was identified by his honorific title (IIa2). Basil, son of Chage from Anysou, was described by reference to his father and a place (II f4). Individuals could be defined by associations with people who had died and places their families had long since left.

Most of the women were widows identified with their late husbands' names, e.g., 'widow Theodora, wife of Leo Pardos' or 'widow Homonia, wife of *kandidatos* Gerontas' (Ia2 and II d2). Entry Vc1 lists 'widow Meleto, wife of *komes* Hypatios, and widow Meleto, wife of *droungarios* Leo'. Either there were two women named Meleto associated with the same property, or, more likely, one Meleto had outlived two husbands. Women were sometimes identified through other male relatives. The widow Poletiane was identified as the 'daughter of Basil son of Chage from Anysou' (V f9). Another woman named Politiane was defined as 'widow Politiane from the village Pholetos, mother-in-law of George Roslinos' (Va1). Not all the women who appear in the text were widows. Eudokia was identified as the wife rather than the widow of the *spatharios* Panaretos (II d1). Another, Sophronia, appears without any identification other than her name (II f3).

Some women had the public prominence needed to serve as reference points when the tax collectors asked who was who. A certain Michael was described twice as the son-in-law of widow Sophronia (V f1 and V f6). The term used, *gambros*, may refer to a son-in-law or to a brother-in-law

(Patlagean 1984: 33). It is possible that Michael's mother-in-law may have been the same Sophronia mentioned in entry IIf3. Sophronia must have had sufficient social prominence to be used as a reference point for her son-in-law. When the tax collectors needed to find this particular Michael, it must have helped to say that he was the son-in-law of widow Sophronia. Presumably, Michael's father, brothers and father-in-law were less well-known in the local community than Sophronia.

This is the only instance of a woman being used to identify a man in the surviving portion of the Cadaster. Yet the document is now only eight sides of a register that obviously would have been much longer to record the taxes of the entire empire. It would be improbable that our fragment contained anything truly unique. It is therefore reasonable to assume that other women were also more easily identified than their male kinsmen.

Other texts containing what appear to be excerpts from imperial taxation registers include the names of both husbands and wives in the entry for each household. In an extract of a eleventh-century fiscal register preserved in the archives of Iviron monastery on Mt Athos each entry represents a household defined by a man and one other person, usually his wife. For example: 'For John son of Ibanis, Theodora his wife' (Lefort et al. 1985: 268). In some cases the man is identified as the *gambros*, son-in-law, of another man as well as, or instead of, the son of his father. This pattern is followed fairly consistently for all of the entries listed under the rubric of the village Dobrobikeia. These households had been given a tax remission, *sympatheia*. At a later time that village was acquired by Iviron and the tax restored. The document contains a second registration for the village Dobrobikeia indicating that the tax was now the responsibility of the monastery. The households in the village which now owed rent to Iviron rather than tax to the empire were listed individually in the second registration. The names of the wives were omitted in the second registration. The name of the male head of household is listed with an indication that the taxation responsibility had passed to the monastery: 'For John son of Ibanis, that is the monastery Iviron' (Lefort et al. 1985: 269).

Why were the names of the women left out of the second registration? It is possible that the names of the women were omitted so that each entry would still take up the same amount of space in the register. In the copy of both the first and second registrations for Dobrobikeia the writer fitted two household entries into each line of text so that they formed two columns. Another possible explanation is that the change in the tax status of the land may have changed the value of the information for each household. At the time when the first registration of Dobrobikeia was made the tax collectors needed to get money out of the households of the village. At the time of the second registration they needed to get money out of the Iviron monastery.

The names of the members of the individual households in the village were probably more valuable to the imperial officials in the first case.

A portion of a fiscal register from the late eleventh or early twelfth century for the village Radolibos is preserved in the same archives of Iviron monastery. This document includes husbands, wives and children in the entries for individual households in Radolibos. The male heads of household are sometimes additionally identified through the names of their fathers or fathers-in-law. For example: 'For Basil son of Ioannikios and Anna his wife and Blasios his son and Barbara his daughter' (Lefort et al. 1990: 187). One household included a husband and wife, their son and his bride. Some households included several children. The largest family had two sons and two daughters. Sons are consistently listed first followed by daughters, indicating that gender rather than age determined the order.

Lists of rent-paying peasants, *paroikoi*, usually include wives and children, listed after the husband. Lists of *paroikoi* usually occur in *praktika*. These documents registered all of the properties owned by one taxpaying entity and the cumulative tax due from that household. For example in the *praktikon* of John Komnenos of 1104 the records for households of *paroikoi* list the name a man and his assets including foremost his wife, for example, 'George Martzaules, has a wife Stratego, *zeugaratos*' (Lefort et al. 1990: 241). The term *zeugaratos* means that the household possessed either a yoke of oxen or the amount of land a yoke of oxen could cultivate. The fragment known as the *Praktikon of Athens*, which may date to the twelfth century, similarly lists husbands, wives, children and a property classification for each peasant household (Granstrom et al. 1976: 39). The fourteenth-century *praktika* list extensive information about peasant households, allowing for the demographic study of later Byzantine history (Laiou 1977).

A possible explanation for the more extensive information recorded about each rent-paying household in the *praktika* may be that it helped the landowner in the process of rent collection. As the imperial administration moved from attempting universal registration to tracking the taxes owed by great proprietors with *praktika*, it allowed the landlords to take over the task of appropriating peasant wealth (Neville 2004: 47–64). A copy of the *praktikon* was kept by the household whose property it recorded. The grand households may have undertaken some of the expense of maintaining accurate and detailed records to lessen resistance to their collection of rents. Other legal and fiscal texts are concerned with counting households whose individual members, both male and female, are not enumerated. Imperial inspectors referring to the rent-paying peasants of monasteries used the terms *paroikos*, *oikos* and *stichos* interchangeably. A *stichos* was a single entry in a tax register. When in 975 Theodore Kladon determined that the monastery of Kolobou was due the services of 36 *paroikoi*, he referred to

them as both *paroikoi* and as *oikoi* (Lefort et al. 1985: 112–13). Another document granting Iviron tax-free status for forty *paroikoi* referred to them once as *paroikoi* and twice as *stichoi* (Lefort et al. 1985: 152–54). These inspectors were counting households of peasants as single entities. This is why only one son inherited the condition of being a *paroikos*; service was due from one household. Second sons and their wives would found new households, if they could, that would need to make their own provision for renting or purchasing land.

Villages that collectively brought suit were represented in legal documentation by individual men, who are best understood as the heads of prominent households of the village. The signatures of the *oikodespotai*, the heads of household, could define the legal party of the village. In an act of exchange between the monastery of Kolobou and the village of Hierissos the village is represented loosely through a selection of male inhabitants. Twenty-eight men signed or drew crosses at the head of the document. The opening declaration of intent listed twenty-three men and ‘the remaining inhabitants of our *kastron*’ (Lefort et al. 1985: 129–34). Some of those listed in the declaration of indent were not among those who signed the text. At another stage of this dispute 74 men signed another document as representatives of the village. This group may have been closer to a complete list of the male heads of household (Lefort et al. 1985: 117–29). In another dispute occurring in 1008 a village, Radochosta, was represented by fourteen men. While they referred to themselves as ‘the inhabitants of the village Radochosta’, they must have been a delegation that stood for the village (Lemerle et al. 1970: 135–39). Even if the village only had fourteen households, the men were acting as representatives for their families. In a dispute between the inhabitants of Siderokausia and the monastery of Kolobou no formal list of individuals acted as representatives of the village. The village was designated as the ‘party (*meros*) of the Siderokausesites’, the ‘village of the Siderokausesites’ and as a community, *koinotes*. The judge also used the rather unspecific term ‘crowd’, *plethos*, to refer to the village in the context of dividing taxation burdens between the monastery and the village (Lefort et al. 1985: 160–63).

The various habits of description seen in these texts display a clear mental subordination of women in the minds of the writers. Households were conceived of as properly represented by a man. The wives, daughters and sons whose labor contributed to the well-being of the households did not need to be named. Husbands were listed before wives and sons were listed before daughters. Women, when named, were defined through the names of their husbands. Men were defined through the names of their fathers.

Given this general subordination, the inclusion of women in these documents becomes all the more interesting. Some of the documents do list wives. This may have been because they were enrolled as an economic resource of the household. It may also be that the names of the wives were considered to help identify their husbands. Occasionally women were used to identify male kinsmen, as in the case of Sophronia and her son-in-law Michael.

In addition to the indication that women could define the men in their lives, the fiscal documents describe a society in which women in fact owned property. The *Cadaster of Thebes* in particular represents Byzantine provincial society as having a significant number of female property owners and tax payers. One of the key difficulties with the cadaster is distinguishing people listed as current payers of tax from those listed as previous owners in order to define the property in question (Neville 2001: 34–37). Yet within any coherent interpretive scheme, women were recorded as taxpayers in the *Cadaster of Thebes*. Using Svoronos' analysis of who paid tax, at least eight of the thirty-four individuals paying tax on property at some point were women. Meleto, the widow of Hypatios and Leo, seems to have paid tax for a vineyard (Vc1). An anonymous widow and widow Politiane, the daughter of Basil, together paid on unspecified property in the village of Tache (Vf1and Vf9). At one point the watermill near the village Keramia was owned jointly by Eudokia the wife of *spatharios* Panaretos, widow Homonia the wife of *kandidatos* Gerontas, and widow Elene the wife of Rendakios the Athenian. The only other taxpayer listed as paying tax on that mill was Demitrios Phalakros, the son of Constantine Rendakios, who may have been Elene's son (IId1–IId4). In several instances the text lists 'heirs of' and the name of the previous owner. Some of the heirs in these groups may have been women. The list of women taxpayers cannot be considered as definite because of lacunae, illegible names, and the ambiguous nature of the text.

The *Cadaster of Thebes* indicates that women were not only proprietors but also employers. Some women were associated with many plots of land in different places, indicating that the owners of farmland may not have been farmers themselves. Eudokia the wife of Panaretos is listed under the rubric of the watermill in the village Keramia. Her entry lists at least another eight pieces of land described as being in a variety of neighborhoods (IId1). Because Eudokia would necessarily have been an absentee landlord for most of her properties, it is highly unlikely that she was directly involved in cultivation of any of them. The tax due on all of her property listed in this entry is only around half a *nomisma*. This relatively low sum suggests that while she could have employed a manager to keep track of her property for her, this may not have been necessary.

Homonia, Eudokia, Elene and Demitrios appear to have been responsible for the tax on the Keramia mill. They may have shared responsibilities for its use and maintenance. Alternatively, one of them may have been entrusted with the management of the mill by the others. Or perhaps a hired miller was in charge of the operation and turned some portion of the profits over to the owners. Their watermill was probably a horizontal mill, which were more common in medieval Greece than the vertical type (Harvey 1989: 129–33).

Female proprietors of agricultural and manufacturing sites are also mentioned in acts of donation, sale, and legal statements preserved in the Athos archives. In a late ninth-century act of sale, Georgia the widow of Demetrios Tzagastes, sold property in several places that included fields for sowing, vineyards, a cistern and a winepress (Lemerle et al. 1970: 89–90). A legal decision of 952 records that a woman, Theodora, owned a ceramic factory or workshop in the tenth century (Lemerle et al. 1970: 98–102). Theodora had received the property as an inheritance from her adoptive mother, Kale the wife of Constantine. While both Kale and Theodora had been legal owners of their ceramic factory, we can only speculate about the extent of their involvement with ceramic manufacturing. As with the mill at Keramia, Kale and Theodora may have been personally involved in ceramic manufacture or they may have worked with a manager.

These instances of women owning property, particularly kinds of property that imply they were significant employers in their communities, puts the depiction of women in the fiscal registers in a different light. Those writing fiscal documents may have tried to inscribe men as the heads of households, yet they faced a society in which women not infrequently acted as the heads of household. Women participated in the provincial economy in ways that could not be ignored. Although according to ideas of the proper order the empire ought to have been comprised of villages consisting of households each headed by a male *oikodespotes*, provincial reality deviated from that ideal in several ways. One of these was that women were sometimes the important people to record.

Similar issues of disparities between the participation of women and their representation in written texts can be explored in the *Confraternity of Thebes*, which contains a self-representation of a provincial community (Nesbitt and Witta 1975). This document is the foundation charter for a religious brotherhood, originally founded in 1048 and re-written in the later eleventh century. The devotion of the brotherhood was expressed through reverence of an icon of the Virgin which resided each month in the church of one of the members of the brotherhood where prayers and liturgies were offered. Each month the brothers would carry the icon in procession to its home for the following month.

On the face of it, the document suggests a degree of gender-integration in social and religious activity that is quite surprising. Four of the 49 signatories of the confraternity charter were women. One of the women who signed the charter had her husband's name listed as part of her identification: 'Sign of Maria wife of Theodore Kamateros.' The other three, Irene Skardos, Maria Mardaros and Manacho Phegellete, were listed without reference to their husbands. We do not know if they were widows. Twenty of the 49 signatories wrote out their own declaration and signature while the others marked a cross next to their name. None of the women wrote out their signature. Those who signed the confraternity declaration used first and last names but ignored any imperial titles they may have had. From other evidence we know that one of the confraternity members, Christopher Kopsinos, did have titles but chose to ignore them in this context (Nesbitt and Witta 1975: 375–76). Some people were additionally identified as priests or monks. With the exception of Maria Kamateros' mention of her husband's first name, the signatories did not identify themselves through the names of their kin.

If the signatures of the women indicate that they were to participate in the processional and other activities of the confraternity in the same ways as the male members, then the document witnesses to greater interaction between unrelated men and women than other evidence has led us to expect. It is in fact so incongruous with what we know about gender segregation in Byzantine society that it is worth considering what the signatures actually meant. The fiscal documents discussed above let us know that sometimes women and their children were not mentioned in representations that identified their households through the names of their husbands. In the records of the legal disputes in which villages collectively brought suit, the names of a selection of men represented not only their wives and children, but their whole communities. It is possible that the signatures on the confraternity charter represent the heads of the households participating in the confraternity. The women who signed the confraternity charter would have done so in their capacity as the heads of their households and thus ensured that the icon would come to their own churches.

Once the icon was in place in a brother's church, it is implausible that his wife, mother, siblings, children and other members of his household and immediate community would not have also prayed before the icon. Many more people participated in the devotions that were the central action of the confraternity than the 49 people who signed the charter. Bringing the icon into one's own community was an act of patronage and care for that community which can be regarded as one of the chief benefits of membership. Although textual evidence is lacking, it would be natural for the hosts of the icon to provide a meal and celebration for the confraternity

members at the end of the procession. The cooking and preparation allowed avenues for participation in the activities of the confraternity that accompanied the processions and liturgies. If these ancillary activities and reverence of the icon are taken as aspects of participation in the confraternity, then the number of women participating was not four, but closer to fifty. Four women signed the document, but my expectation is that their participation took the same forms as that of the wives of the male signatories.

Women are known to have conducted festive processions themselves. Psellos described a Constantinopolitan organization of women whose activities involved processions (Laiou 1986: 111–13). It is certainly possible that the processions of the confraternity included women as well as men. Given the information available however, I think it is more likely that the women who signed the charter participated in the women's aspects of the confraternity along with the wives who were not mentioned at all. Gender segregation would be compatible with women and men participating in different activities of the confraternity.

A potential difficulty with this interpretation lies in the provision of the confraternity that members would provide for each other's burial, if it were necessary. A literalist reading of the text would have only those people who signed the document included among those entitled to burial expenses. Seeing the signatories as representatives of their households would either extend burial privileges to a large and loosely defined group or mean that the burial requirement was a metaphorical statement of commitment to provide help in need. Both of these possibilities are reasonable. While the burial provision sets the confraternity in the ancient tradition of burial associations, the contexts and practices of burial had changed enough by the eleventh century for us to expect this provision to have a different meaning. The contingencies of space that fueled the importance of burial societies in classical cities may not have been so pressing in the less densely populated context of medieval Thebes. The confraternity provision does not deal with the critical issue of where a burial was to take place. Classical burial societies were concerned to obtain *places* for their dead. In some of these associations one membership brought an allocation of several places in the collective tomb (Hopkins 1983: 212–15). The rules governing burial were elaborate and formal in classical Roman burial clubs, unlike the vague statement in the confraternity. In medieval Byzantine burials proximity to churches was the paramount concern and hierarchy among the dead is clearly seen in the placement and grandeur of graves (Iverson 1993: 270–72). If the confraternity had access to a site for burial in or near a particular church, that benefit would have been mentioned in the charter. We do not have reason to think that the participants of the confraternity would have

needed help with their burials. The monks who signed the document would have had burial arrangements within their houses. The other requirements of membership indicate that none of the families in the confraternity would have been in danger of poverty. Given this context it seems that the confraternity may have been called on to take care of a burial only rarely.

On the other hand, if a signatory of the confraternity needed help to bury a member of his or her household, the other members certainly would be forthcoming. The literalist interpretation of the charter would mean that if one of the male signatories and his wife died in poverty the confraternity would bury him but not his wife. This is difficult to reconcile with a brotherhood devoted to prayer for all the members, living and dead. I understand the agreement to provide burial expenses as representing a more general promise to help each other in times of need. Each of the signatories pledged to use the resources of his or her household to help the other families when needed. The responsibility for providing various aspects of prayerful support and community help would have been shared in similar ways by the women who signed the document themselves and the women whose husbands signed.

This interpretation fits with the image that emerged from the discussion of the fiscal officials' representations – that women were ignored but present. The confraternity presented itself as a group of men with a few additional women. Behind that presentation may lay a situation where many more women participated in activities none of which may have been gender-integrated. Most of the women, and all of the activities exclusively undertaken by women, were left out of the written record.

Another fascinating set of representations of provincial women are found in legal documents in which women were party to the transaction. Acts of donation and sale involving women provide what are ostensibly first-person declarations of intent by women. These statements were written by the men creating the documents and may have differed considerably from the sentiments the women wished to express (Neville 2004: 139–47). These documents employ Late Roman legal forms, recognizably but not rigidly. Patterns were expected, but wording varied, apparently with the pressures which bore on particular cases (Simon 1971: 176). The documents provide a view to both enduring ancient rhetoric about the incapacity of women and situations in which the actions of provincial women were pivotal.

It may have been possible to challenge a woman's financial decisions on the basis of weaknesses assumed in her gender. Acts of sale and donation routinely contained declarations of the seller or donor's free will in making the transaction. Women were frequently, although not universally, made to attest that their status as women had not hindered their thinking. For example in 897 Georgia swore that she donated her property voluntarily, and

without any 'trickery, fear, violence, compulsion, difficult circumstances, robbery, baiting, extortion, joking or female simplicity' (Lemerle et al. 1970: 89). The inclusion of a denial that a woman acted out of 'female simplicity' implies that it was possible to challenge a donation or testament on those grounds. Quite apart from the laws that governed women and men differently, here legal rhetoric habitually enshrined prejudice against women's ability to make decisions.

While I have not found an example of a women's testament or sale being disputed by others on the basis of her gender, there is some evidence that women themselves used the rhetoric of female weakness to alter their own dispositions. The nun Glykeria succeeded in changing her donation in part by appealing to her female weakness to overturn her earlier act. This course of events is known because she subsequently donated her land to the monastery of Great Lavra of Mt Athos. The act of donation of 1016 contains Glykeria's narration of the travails and vicissitudes she overcame in order to make the donation (Lemerle et al. 1970: 155–61). Glykeria and her husband John, who lived on Skyros, had founded a monastery on their land which they endowed with all of their possessions. The precise details of their story are vague because of the poor preservation of the document and perhaps because Glykeria was not entirely candid. It appears that John and Glykeria had tried to keep their monastery independent of the local bishop. The bishop banned the celebration of the liturgy at their monastery and censured those priests who served them. John went to Constantinople in an attempt to get patriarchal protection for their monastery, but died in the midst of the dispute. According to Glykeria, their church was then burned down and the bishop, threatening her with bodily violence, forced her to donate her land to him against her will. After further dispute, Glykeria was able to donate her land to the Eustratios, the abbot (*hegoumenos*) of the Great Lavra of Mt Athos. This second donation is the document surviving the archives of Lavra. The story is also mentioned by Eustratios in another act of donation (Lemerle et al. 1970: 141–144).

Glykeria's donation provides an interesting perspective on the clauses of free-will in which donors deny that coercion, force, violence or female simplicity influenced their actions. Glykeria, wanting to annul her prior donation, said that it had been made under coercion. In describing the stage of the dispute when she made the first donation, Glykeria depicted herself as a helpless, childless widow in an apparent effort to elicit sympathy and support. She used a vocabulary of un-willingness and tyranny that recalls the standard formulae of the donor or seller's volition. While she does not explicitly say that her 'female simplicity' led her to be easily preyed upon, she appealed to notions of female weakness in order to overturn her previous donation. Judging from the archives of Lavra, it seems that she was

successful in arguing that her first donation was invalid. Paradoxically, her self-presentation as a helpless woman played to notions of female incapacity and may have helped her to defy the will of her bishop and carry out her own plan for her land.

In 1112 Eudokia employed the rhetoric of helplessness and poverty to circumvent legal restrictions on selling her dowry. The daughter of Gregory Bourion and wife of *protospatharios* Stephen Rasopolos, Eudokia sold part of her dowry to the monastery of Docheiariou (Oikonomides 1984: 67–73). This was illegal because the land was part of her dowry. The appropriate passage of the *Basilika* banning the sale of dowry land except in extremity (book 28 [chapter 8](#)) was quoted in her act of sale. A woman's husband had the usufruct of dowry so long as they were married but the property ultimately belonged to either her children or her parents. The laws restricting the sale of dowry were designed to protect the interests of women's natal families from mismanagement by their husbands and the women themselves.

At the request of the monks of Docheiariou, Eudokia obtained legal permission from the governor, the *doux* of Thessalonike Andronikos Doukas, to make the sale. She argued that her family was completely indigent and that it would therefore be uncharitable for the law to block the sale. Eudokia made an emotional case to Andronikos Doukas that she and her children were 'in danger of dying from hunger and from lack of necessities'. Her petition, quoted fully in the act of sale, emphasized her humility and abasement before the power of the *doux*:

Yea, my holy master, let the present *oikonomia* stand for me your unfortunate and unworthy slave, lest we perish most badly and pass from this world. And may God guide you. I am beseeching as a daring unworthy slave (Oikonomides 1984: 68).

Eudokia did not mention that her husband was a *protospatharios* or that the land sold was only a portion of her property. Doukas answered that her cause seemed legitimate and that she should be allowed to sell the land.

A council of prominent local men was then asked to judge whether Eudokia's appeal to Doukas reflected her own intentions. They questioned her in detail and confessed themselves convinced that her petition had been written with her approval. They were not concerned with whether she was in fact suffering from poverty. It appears that the task of the committee was make sure that she could not later overturn the sale by claiming that she had not wanted to send the petition but had done so under coercion.

Eudokia's act is far more elaborate, detailed and repetitious than other acts of sale of the same period. This elaboration is best explained by the fear of the monks that Eudokia or her family would try to challenge the sale. Although she obtained permission for the sale from Doukas by portraying

herself as poor and helpless, she made strong statements about her own self-determination and free choice in selling the land before the committee and throughout the act of sale. She specifically abjured acting out of female simplicity.

If we believe that these documents reflect Glykeria and Eudokia's real desires, then they were able to achieve their goals in part by having themselves portrayed as helpless. Eudokia's petition primarily drew on the rhetorical tradition of 'the poor' crying out for help from on high (Neville 2004: 161). Byzantine ideology about the helplessness of women added emotional weight to the depiction of her as a mother struggling to care for young children. Her gender easily allowed her to become a subject for pity. Similarly Glykeria's widowhood was central in portraying her as unable to resist pressure from her bishop. These acts of sale and donation display a deeply-rooted association between weakness and womanhood. Yet they also show women acting forcefully. The monks of Dochieariou were afraid of Eudokia's potential ability to overturn her sale. Glykeria successfully persecuted a violent dispute with her bishop, in which the bishop may have only been endeavoring to protect his canonical rights.

The texts here examined simultaneously uphold the notional subordination and sequestering of women in provincial society and provide examples of women acting in significant public roles. On the one hand appropriate order had men in charge. Men were the proper *oikodespotai*. Households and communities were properly represented by men. Women, when recorded, could be listed as assets of households defined by men. The need to deny female simplicity in making legal decisions reflected enduring cultural denigration of women's mental capacity. On the other hand, women appear as active and significant participants in provincial society in all of the evidence examined. Women were prominent proprietors and employers who were necessarily visible and noteworthy in their communities. That Sophronia's son-in-law Michael was identified through her name meant that she was important and more renowned than any of his male kin. The evidence of the Confraternity means that women could act as representatives of their households, even while their husbands were living. The stories of Glykeria and Eudokia show women actively participating in the transactions of provincial society and suggest that at times the very notions of female weakness could be manipulated to allow women to act effectively. The conclusion may be that women did more than they were supposed to.



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Mary ‘of Alania’: Woman & Empress Between Two Worlds

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‘Your majesty, you have changed. It seems to us that you are worried by private cares and because you have no one to whom you can confide your secret you have lost heart.’ She, unwilling as yet to reveal anything but sighing deeply, replied, ‘There is no need to question a stranger like that; the very fact that strangers live in a foreign land is reason enough for sorrow. Heaven knows the troubles I have had, one after another – and soon, apparently, there will be more in store for me.’ (Anna Komnene *Alexiad* 2.2.2; Leib 1.67; Sewter 76)

Despite being a Byzantine empress twice over at this point in her career, Mart‘a-Mary ‘of Alania’ was disempowered and felt herself to be so, as her reply to Isaac Komnenos, her cousin’s husband, demonstrates. As a Georgian princess she was a foreigner in Byzantium, at a time when foreign empresses were not the norm, and lacked a family support network, the typical power-base on which indigenous aristocratic women depended and of which they were so proud. The seals of imperial and aristocratic women, and their choice of nomenclature, show clearly that in many cases they considered themselves as belonging to their family of birth (and often their mother’s family) rather than their husband’s, for example, the elder daughter of Anna Komnene who chose to be known by her grandmother’s name: Irene Doukaina (see Bryennios 30–1). Mary’s position was typical of that of many aristocratic and imperial women who were to transfer into the sophisticated Byzantine court culture, and her disadvantages must have been shared, at least in part, by her successors from the west, such as Piroshka of Hungary, Bertha of Sulzbach, Maria of Antioch and Agnes of Savoy, as well as by those Georgian princesses who were to marry the two grandsons of Alexios Komnenos (varzos 1984: 308–17; cf. Macrides 1992). While Byzantine princesses who were destined to be diplomatic pawns were clearly educated for their task in representing Byzantium abroad (Herrin 1995), it is unlikely that Mary, despite the fact that Georgian kings had been accustomed to send

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their daughters to be the wives of foreign monarchs, would have received so formalized an education intended to enable her to cope with the complexities of life and political intrigue at the Byzantine court. This being the case, her Georgian background – a distinct disadvantage in Byzantine eyes – and the ways in which it might have affected her engagement in Byzantine court politics deserve detailed study.

Georgia and Byzantium in the era of Mary ‘of Alania’

When Mary ‘of Alania’ set foot in Byzantium, distinct – yet always evolving – forms of Georgian identity had been in existence for over a millennium. Caucasasia, the region around the Caucasus mountains to which the various Georgian territories belong, had long been a vibrant Eurasian crossroads. This geographically diverse and strategic ribbon of land pushing apart the Black and the Caspian Seas had attracted merchants, missionaries, and soldiers from the most remote times. Indigenous Caucasians were deeply affected by a constellation of Eurasian influences, yet despite the heavy imperial pressures encumbering the region, local peoples were able to carve out and maintain their own distinct identities.

Although Classical sources frequently allude to Caucasasia (for example, Javakhishvili 1979, 1983; Toumanoff 1963; Braund 1994, 1997), it is only after the fourth-century conversions of the Armenian king Trdat and the K’art’velian monarch Mihran (Mirian) that references to K’art’li (Georgia) become more regular and accurate: Prokopios furnishes important information as does Agathias, Menander the Protector, and Theophanes. But it is really only after the reign of Herakleios (r. 610–41) and the Islamic conquest, and the ascendancy of a Georgian branch of the Armenian Bagratid dynasty with the support of Constantinople in the early ninth century, that Byzantine historians begin to exhibit a deep familiarity with the interior lands of Georgia. Thus, Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos devotes two chapters of his *De administrando imperio* to the ‘Iberians’, the Greek term for K’art’velians: Byzantine historians of this period used the terms ‘Iberia’ and ‘Iberian’ with great imprecision. In the eleventh century, both could refer not only to K’art’li but also to the Chalcedonian population of Armenia and the so-called ‘Iberian Theme’. Constantine emphasizes the strategic importance of K’art’li and provides detailed and fairly accurate information about the K’art’velians, including a genealogy of contemporary Bagratids (*DAI* chs. 45–6).

The eastward expansion of the Byzantine historiographical horizon corresponds with a new stage of Georgian historical writing. It should first be noted that Georgian literature is inseparable from the triumph of Christianity. Georgian became a written language only after Christian clerics invented a specifically Georgian script at the end of the fourth or start of the

fifth century. Original Georgian literature in the form of hagiography appeared at the end of the fifth century. Works of a more secular, historical nature emerged considerably later, around the year 800. These earliest histories were composed just prior to the seizure of power by the Bagratid dynasty in 813 and locate the K'art'velian experience within epic Persian history. Furthermore, they depict K'art'velian kingship and society in terms that would have been recognized throughout the vast zone of Persian culture.

This overtly Near Eastern framework is conspicuously absent from histories sponsored by the Bagratids. Bagratid-era histories first appeared in the eleventh century and regularly incorporated events and people from the Byzantine commonwealth. They now embedded local kingship within a Byzantine matrix. While conversion to Christianity had paved the way, it was the ninth-century ascendancy of the Bagratid dynasty that marks the fuller integration of the Georgian lands into the polycultural world of Byzantium. That integration becomes increasingly apparent when the all-Georgian monarchs unilaterally usurped the trappings of the *basileus*, especially at the end of the eleventh century. It is at this time that Byzantine historians like Psellos, Skylitzes/Kedrenos, Bryennios, and Zonaras prominently refer to Georgia and Georgians. But even though the Georgians came to participate in the Byzantine world as never before, they emphatically maintained their own language, historical traditions and culture. Despite the carefully manipulated images enshrined in local historical writing, the intimate connection of Georgia and the Georgians with the Near East continued as is strikingly evident on contemporary Georgian coinage whose legends are composed in Georgian and Arabic (and not in Greek). The Georgian crown endeavoured to exploit its positioning between 'East' and 'West' in a series of coins minted ca. 1200 AD in the name of Queen T'amar (r. 1184–1213). This depicted a local variant of the Byzantine *labarum* (obverse) and an Arabic inscription proclaiming T'amar as the 'Glory of the world and faith... Champion of the Messiah' (reverse) (Rapp 1993).

The eleventh century – when Bagratid historiography was first produced – was a time of great fluctuation and uncertainty in Byzantino-Georgian relations; it witnessed an unprecedented intensity of Byzantino-Georgian encounters (eg, Lordkipanidze 1994: 47–188; Badridze 1984). At the end of the tenth century, the powerful prince Davit' of Tao/Tayk' (David the kouropalates) supported Basil II (r. 976–1025) in the rebellion of Bardas Skleros but then turned against his imperial patron by backing Bardas Phokas in his own insurrection. Once the threat posed by Phokas had been exterminated, Basil coerced the kouropalates to promise the future surrender of key Anatolian and western Caucasian lands. Davit' had other plans, however. He adopted his kinsman, the prince Bagrat, and designated him

heir. Because of Davit's actions, and owing to Bagrat's fortunate pedigree, Bagrat III assumed the helm of the first all-Georgian realm, a political enterprise merging lands both to the east (including K'art'li) and west (including Ap'xazet'i, Greek: Abasgia) of the Surami mountains in addition to Davit's own possessions.

Bagrat's son and successor Giorgi I (r. 1014–1027) inherited a tense situation that compelled him to engage the Byzantine army. Byzantine soldiers were particularly active in the western Georgian domains, although Constantinople's reach extended far inland through its network of spies and its endorsement of Georgian aristocrats and even royal pretenders opposed to the ruling Bagratids. In 1022, Giorgi lent support to the short-lived rebellion led by the 'two Nikephoroi', Nikephoros Xiphias and Nikephoros Phokas. A year or so later the Georgians and Byzantines concluded a tenuous peace. As part of the bargain, Giorgi sent his three-year old son and heir Bagrat to Constantinople as a hostage.

The young child Bagrat spent the next three years in the imperial capital and was released in 1025. As he returned home Basil II passed away and his brother Constantine VIII (r. 1025–8) became the sole emperor. Constantine ordered the retrieval of the young prince, but the imperial agent was unable to overtake him (Sumbat Davit'is-dze, paras. 62–6). Bagrat IV succeeded his father on the Georgian throne in 1027 (aged eight) and ruled down to 1072. This Bagrat was the son of Queen Mariam and the father of Mary 'of Alania.' By the 1020s, the Bagratids' drive to unify the Georgian lands had gained unstoppable momentum. Simultaneously, the Georgian Crown was confronted with two formidable external foes: the Byzantines and the Seljuq Turks. Potentially, Byzantium was a powerful ally, though Constantinople became obsessed with manipulating the Caucasian political scene as thoroughly as possible and this contributed to an atmosphere of distrust and recrimination. Ultimately, the Georgians viewed both the Christian Byzantines and the Muslim Seljuqs as impeding consolidation. There was no overwhelming incentive or benefit to be gained from an outright alliance and truce with Constantinople as opposed to the Seljuqs. In fact, Bagrat's policy can be understood as the attempt to play the Seljuqs and Byzantines off against one another. Here, once again, we see the equipoise between 'East' and 'West' at work.

A crucial element of Bagrat IV's diplomatic efforts was to establish strategic associations through carefully orchestrated marriages (Rapp 1997: 615–22). We shall see that Bagrat parcelled out his daughter and niece to the Seljuq sultan and the Byzantine emperor. In 1032/1033, Bagrat himself married the Byzantine princess Helena Argyropoulaina, niece of Romanos III Argyros (r. 1028–1034). Helena's death presented the king with the opportunity to pursue yet another diplomatic initiative. Mimicking the

practice of pre-Bagratid times, Bagrat's second wife was Borena, sister of the chief of Ovset'i (Alania) in northern Caucasia (Toumanoff 1990: 134–5). The Ovis had long attracted the attention of the K'art'velian and then Georgian Crown. The anonymous ninth-century author of the *Life of Vaxtang* alleges that the Ovis constantly harassed their lowland neighbours. In the more immediate past, the second wife of Giorgi I, Bagrat's father and predecessor, was the daughter of the Ovis chief.

Borena's foreign extraction is not specially highlighted in Georgian historiography, yet her famous daughter, Mary, was commonly known as 'the Alan' in Byzantine circles (Toumanoff 1966: 622, n.1). It is logical to have expected Byzantine writers to refer to her as 'the Iberian' or even 'the Abasgian'. Byzantine and Islamic writers routinely described the Georgian rulers of this time as the monarchs of the Ap'xaz (Greek: Abasgians), as in the passage below from the *Life of Giorgi Mt'acmideli* in which the Georgian king Bagrat IV is identified as 'king of the Ap'xaz'. Byzantines sometimes confused these two terms, though there are no other prominent instances of 'Alan' having been misconstrued for 'Iberian'. Owing to the turbulent relations between Georgia and Byzantium, it is possible that this was a deliberate slur. However, Anna Komnene was close to Mary and does not indicate that Mary objected to the nickname. We must wonder, therefore, whether she chose to call herself – or allowed herself to be called – 'of Alania', perhaps in protest at her forced removal from Georgia to the Byzantine court. (One should recall that her father's own sojourn in Constantinople had not occurred under ideal circumstances.) Or perhaps she wished to deflect attention away from her connection with the recalcitrant Georgians, though it is not clear how 'of Alania' would have proven more advantageous than 'of Iberia'. In any case, Mary is never called 'of Alania' in Georgian-language sources and is simply known by the Georgian forms of her name, Mart'a (equivalent to the Greek Martha) and then Mariam: it is significant that the Georgian 'Mariam' (Μαριάμ) is used (in Greek transliteration) in the Greek inscription on the plaque depicting her and Michael VII Doukas on the Xaxuli (Khakhuli) triptych (Nodia 1978: 150).

Mary and 'Alania' in Byzantine sources

As a Georgian princess, Mart'a-Mary was only the second foreigner to reach the Byzantine throne in over three hundred years, since Irene the Chazar was married to Constantine V in 732. Her foreign origins were always apparent to her subjects, though the details of her actual ancestry were of little concern except to those with insider knowledge: John Tzetzes, who should have known better, being himself Georgian on his mother's side, calls her Mary of Abasgia 'whom most people inaccurately call from Alania' (*Chiliades* 5.588, 592–3; Gautier 1970). In his *Chiliades* (591–601) he also

explains that Iberians (Georgians), Abasgians and Alans are all one people. Outlining his own ancestry, Tzetzes states that his grandmother was herself an 'Abasgian' and a relative of Mary of Alania (not a servant, as malicious tongues have maintained!) who came to Byzantium with her and later became the second wife of the 'famous' sebastos Constantine, grand droungarios and nephew of the patriarch Michael Keroularios. Historians in general are vague about Mary's background, while stressing her distinguished ancestry in very general terms. Michael Psellos, who knew her personally, and who was proud of the fact that she was the godmother of his grandson by an adopted daughter, raves over his grandson's affectionate reception in the palace by the queen.¹ In his *Chronographia* (7.9; Renaud 2.177; Sewter 372) he speaks only of the wealth and antiquity of her family, without bothering to name her country of origin. In the context of the 'Alan' mistress of Constantine Monomachos in the 1050s, Psellos goes further in denigrating Georgia as a country, stating specifically that 'the kingdom of Alania was not particularly distinguished in itself, nor had it any great prestige: indeed, it regularly supplied pledges of loyalty, such as hostages, to the Byzantine empire' (6.151; R 2.45; S 235). Anna Komnene, who lived with Mary and was betrothed to her son, avoids any discussion of Mary's background, as does Theophylact in his educational treatise written for her son Constantine (*Or.* 4; Gautier 1.184): though royal, her non-Greek, 'barbarian' background was seen as better glossed over, even by her admirers. The Continuator of Skylitzes (738) simply calls her an 'Alan', while Bryennios (143) is the most accurate, describing her as the daughter of Bagrat, ruler of the Iberians. Clearly, while the Byzantines could feel positive esteem for the rulers of western European kingdoms, Mary's Georgian background was considered somewhat of a disadvantage. In contrast, Shepard (1988: 88) notes that the lament in 949 for the young Frankish princess Bertha-Eudokia, daughter of Hugh of Provence and bride of Romanos II (r. 959–963),² speaks of her as coming 'from the peoples of Europe, even from those distinguished and famous for both splendour of birth and greatness of power, and possessing the thriving and most fertile of the Italian lands'.

Despite Mary's rather undesirable foreign origins, and the uniqueness of her position, she was to become a significant player in Byzantine politics of the late eleventh century. As the wife of Michael VII Doukas (r. 1071–1078),

¹ Psellos *Scripta Minora* 1.80–1; Leroy-Molinghen 1969: esp. 293–4. In later life, perhaps in 1093, the young lad was to ask the help of Theophylact, then archbishop of Ochrid (Theophylact *Ep.* 27; 2.219–21). As Maria had been Theophylact's literary patron and he Constantine's tutor the connection was obviously through Maria.

² For this lament, see Lampros 1978; cf. Theophanes Cont. 431; Constantine Porph. *DAI* 112.66–72; Kazhdan & Epstein 1985: 177; Macrides 1992b: esp. 266–71.

and empress for the second time when she married Nikephoros III Botaniates (r. 1078–1081) during her first husband's lifetime, she was responsible for the well-being and future status of the young emperor Constantine, her only child, after Michael's abdication. She was then a prime mover in the successful coup of Alexios Komnenos against Nikephoros. She appears to have retained great influence over Alexios following his accession to the throne, and was later suspected of conspiracy against him. She was also one of the first Byzantine imperial women to act as a patron of literature, theology and art, and appears to have been one of Byzantium's more empowered women with a record of political successes to her credit. Her one main defeat may have been her failure to marry Alexios, and even this she turned to her advantage. During three reigns, from 1071, she maintained her position as Augusta, and more importantly secured that of Constantine, her son by Michael Doukas, as heir to the throne and son-in-law to Alexios, until his premature death in or after 1094.

Yet Mary was working under difficulties. She was, in the first place, a foreigner and not from the more acceptable west, and only the second foreign bride to marry into the royal house in, perhaps, 340 years. She was brought to Constantinople at some point between 1066 and 1071 to marry Michael (VII) Doukas, though it is difficult to ascertain what may have been the reasons for her selection and this break with tradition. Michael's father Constantine X succeeded to the throne on the abdication of Isaac Komnenos in 1059, and perhaps the fact that the regime was a new one led to this statement of imperial strength in order to consolidate his position. A further factor may have been the young Mart'a's appearance, for a portrait of her may well have been sent to Byzantium to demonstrate her suitability for the position of empress, for beauty was much prized in an imperial bride, whatever her family background (Garland 1994), and our sources speak of her as extremely attractive. According to Anna Komnene, Mary was so beautiful that – like the Gorgon's head – she was capable of rendering a bystander speechless or rooted to the spot.³ The account of the *Chronicle of K'art'li* (Qauxch'ishvili 1955: 308), if strictly chronological, would suggest a date for her arrival c. 1065–66, while the *Life of Giorgi Mt'acmideli* (George the Athonite) (37), written by Giorgi Mc'ire ('the Lesser') around 1070, states categorically that she was brought to Constantinople by 'Doukas' (i.e. Constantine X), which would mean in or before 1067. However, the marriage need not have taken place immediately, as it was not uncommon for brides to spend a period of 'training' in the royal palace prior to their marriage, and

³ *Alexiad* 3.2.4 (L 1.107–8; S 107); cf. Psellos 7.9 (R 2.177; S 372); Laiou 1992c: 94–5; Garland 1994: 261–2. For portraits of Maria and Michael, see Spatharakis 1976: pls. 9–11, 70, 74; for the conventionalised depiction of Mary's features in minatures and on coins, see Evangelatou-Notara 1994.

Mary and Michael may not have been actually married until 1071. Certainly the couple were married and Mary a 'basilissa' by the beginning of 1072 (Bryennios 137). As it was not uncommon for imperial brides to be married at fourteen or fifteen years of age, we may tentatively suggest c. 1052–55 for Mary's date of birth.

There were relatively close connections between the Byzantine and Georgian royal houses following Bagrat's first marriage to Helena Argyropoulaina in 1032/33. On the other hand, while it was not unusual for Byzantine princesses to be sent abroad, it was highly unusual for a princess to be imported. However it was customary for young Georgian princes, like Bagrat IV himself from 1023 to 1025 in the reign of Basil II (*Chronicle of K'art'li*, Qauxch'ishvili 1955: 288–9), and princesses to be held at the Byzantine court as hostages, implying that Georgia was quite specifically seen as a weaker power. Indeed Psellos describes the relationship in these terms, though he stresses that during the period that the 'Alan princess' – ('daughter of the king there' and 'one of our hostages from Alania') was Constantine IX Monomachos's mistress (Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.151–2, 155; R 2.45–6, 47; S 235–7) – she was treated as quasi-empress. Valuable gifts were sent to Georgia and extravagant displays put on before the Georgian envoys who visited the court two or three times a year. Constantinople could be a place of refuge for a Georgian monarch in trouble: according to the *Chronicle of K'art'li* (Qauxch'ishvili 1955: 303) and the *Life of Giorgi Mt'acmideli* (31), Bagrat IV and his mother, Queen Mariam, spent three years in Constantinople, perhaps between 1052 and 1054 before returning to power in Georgia (cf. Skylitzes 447–8, who dates their arrival in Constantinople to 1048). The young Mart'a herself is said to have initially arrived in Constantinople in 1056 at the end of the reign of Theodora, presumably, like other Georgian princelings, to be a hostage at court. She was perhaps three years old at the time and was sent home after Theodora's death in the same year, returning some ten years later as an imperial bride.

Mary 'of Alania' in Georgian-language sources

Contemporary Georgian-language sources say remarkably little about Mary 'of Alania' (for example, Nodia 1978; Mikaberidze 1998; Zekos 1998). Although the ascension of the Bagratid dynasty in the ninth century had the effect of associating the Georgian lands with the Byzantine commonwealth as never before, from Constantinople's perspective Georgia was a peripheral zone. Bagratid-era Georgian historical works have much to say about events in Byzantium, but their information is nevertheless uneven and sometimes imprecise. The lack of information about Mary in Georgian sources seems to indicate that she had relatively little contact with her homeland once she had reached Constantinople, although some Georgian scholars claim that Mary

returned to Georgia on at least two occasions, in 1072 and 1081 (Nodia 1978: 150–1; Alexidze 1991: 207). The first of these, however, when Bagrat's daughter 'Mariam' is said to have been present at his death-bed in November 1072 (*Chronicle of K'art'li*, Qauxch'ishvili 1955: 314), apparently refers to Mariam, the sister of the empress, not Mary herself as Mary is always known as Mart'a in Georgian sources. Mary had two siblings, the future Giorgi II and Mariam (Toumanoff 1990: 134–5). It is worth pondering, however, why a later Georgian source – one written in the twelfth century after Mary's intrigues in Byzantium must have become known to the Georgian court – does not speak at length about her. After all, by the end of the eleventh century, the Bagratids depicted their monarch as an equal of the Byzantine emperor, at least within the purview of the Near East. The inflation of Byzantine titles – to *panhypersebastos* and even *basileus* – and their disposal in the early twelfth century in favour of the generic 'autocrat'; usage of Byzantine imperial insignia; claim of direct biological descent from the King-Prophet David; and loud rhetoric in Georgian historical sources all indicate that the Georgian monarchs believed themselves to be equals of the Byzantine emperor, at least within the milieu of greater Caucasia (Rapp 1997: 481sq.). The achievements of Mary 'of Alania' would have bolstered this bid for equalization yet they are virtually unknown in contemporary Georgian histories.

Mary's solitary appearance in the medieval Georgian historical tradition occurs in the *Chronicle of K'art'li*, the so-called 'Georgian Royal Annals' and 'Georgian Chronicles', written by a contemporaneous anonymous author. In its extant form, this consists of thirteen distinct medieval texts composed between the ninth and fourteenth centuries. The component histories of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* focus on the monarch and the ruling dynasty. Their pages are dominated by warfare and civil war as well as the incessant tension between the centralizing Crown and the aristocracy. Women were regarded as having had a minimal role in this scheme and therefore Georgian histories say virtually nothing about them. Those who are mentioned often remain nameless even though they might have commanded enormous prestige and authority. Of Mary, we read that:

The great king Bagrat gave his daughter Mart'a [i.e., Mary] in marriage to the king of the Greeks. After this he gave his niece in marriage to the sultan, the king of the Persians [i.e., the Seljuq sultan] (*Chronicle of K'art'li* 307–8; Thomson 1996: 300).

Rather than saying something about Mary's experiences in Byzantium, the purpose of this account is to show Georgia's centrality in the diplomacy of western Asia and specifically how Bagrat married his female relatives to the other great rulers in the vicinity.

The most substantial reference to Mary in medieval Georgian sources is encountered in the eleventh-century *Life of Giorgi Mt'acmideli*. Giorgi Mt'acmideli ('of the Holy Mountain', 1009–65) is one of the greatest figures of medieval Christian Georgia: he acted as abbot of the Ivron (literally 'of the Georgians') monastery on Mt. Athos and became legendary for defending the autocephaly of the Georgian Church when it was questioned by the patriarch of Antioch. Like Mary, Giorgi was an agent of cross-cultural contact, a bridge drawing together Georgian and Byzantine civilizations. The saintly biographer Giorgi Mc'ire writes:

For at the time, when the kingdom of the Greeks [i.e., the Byzantine Empire] was ruled by Queen T'eodora [Theodora], she asked the king of the Ap'xaz Bagrat to give his daughter Mart'a so that she might be brought up as her own child.

And King Bagrat, with great happiness, sent his daughter Mart'a [to Byzantium] along with his personal servants. And in those days, by divine will, Queen Theodora passed away [August 1056]. And at the same time, Queen Mariam, the mother of King Bagrat, was there and our holy father [Giorgi Mt'acmideli] was also there on some business. But, as we have said, at that moment when Queen Theodora passed away, they led Mart'a, the daughter of Bagrat, into the kingdom [*sameup'o*, also 'royal' so might refer to Constantinople, the royal city]. And when the holy man [Giorgi] saw Mart'a, within everyone's ear-range he prophesied, saying that: 'Let everyone know that today the Queen has departed and the Queen has arrived.' And then she stayed for a short time and again they brought Mart'a. And after some time had elapsed, Dukie' [ie, Doukas] again summoned her and she was taken to the imperial city to be his daughter-in-law. Then, as had been foretold by the monk [Giorgi], when they saw how she had reached maturity, everyone was surprised and they gave thanks to God, who beforehand had revealed his will. And Queen Mariam said to the holy man [Giorgi], when she had been in the east: 'O Father, the prophesy that you foretold about Mart'a has come to fruition.'⁴

The third Georgian reference to Mary contains no information save her name. In the acts of the first formal all-Georgian ecclesiastical council summoned by King Davit' II at the adjacent Ruisi and Urbnisi cathedrals in 1103, there is an allusion to *dedop'alisa ch'uenisa mart'a avghwstinaisni*, 'Our Queen Mart'a the Augusta.' This statement confirms that Mary was still alive in 1103 (Dolidze 1970: 126). In the acts, her name occurs in a list of commemorations [*mosaq'senebelni*] given for prominent Georgians and,

⁴ Giorgi Mc'ire, *C'xorebay giorgi mt'acmidelisay*, cap. 14 (Abuladze, p. 14). When *K'art'lis c'xovreba* was re-edited in the early eighteenth century under the direction of King Vaxtang VI, this passage – in a slightly modified form – was inserted into the corpus (Thomson 1996: #33, 377–8). No extant medieval MS of the corpus incorporates it.

moreover, is elevated to the first position, even before that of King Davit⁴ himself. The document thus attests to the esteem in which she was held in her homeland, and further complicates the issue about why she does not enjoy a more conspicuous role in the Georgian historical tradition.

Mary in Constantinople: Survival in a Strange Land

As stated earlier, one of the main problems which Mary faced was the lack of a family network, other than the relatives whom she brought with her from Georgia. With little knowledge of the institutions and sophisticated workings of the court, and speaking a language not her native tongue, she was at a disadvantage in comparison with other imperial brides. One of the greatest assets of aristocratic women in Byzantium was the support ensured by their influential relatives: good examples here are Eudokia Makrembolitissa and Anna Dalassene, both of whom used family support to aggrandise themselves and their children. Anna Dalassene, for example, the head of the Komnenos family between her husband's death in July 1067 and Alexios's coup in April 1081, ensured that her family was allied with all the possible contenders for the throne, and it was during this period that she formed a dextrous network of marriage connections with a number of prominent families, which was to facilitate her son's coup (Bryennios 85–7; Varzos 1984: 1.61–120). Women who lacked these facilities might feel themselves severely disadvantaged, though potential husbands might see such isolation as an asset. The Caesar John Doukas advised the new emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates to marry Mary of Alania, rather than any of the other contenders for the role of empress, precisely because she was of foreign birth and had no crowd of relatives to embarrass or importune him (*Alexiad* 3.2.3–5 (L 1.107–8; S 107); Bryennios 253–5; Skylitzes Cont. 181; Zonaras 3.722). She was also extremely beautiful. On the other hand, the importance in Byzantine society of families of Armeno-Georgian descent, such as the Kekaumenoï, Pakourianoï (Bakuriani), Phokades, Skleroi and the Dalassenoï themselves, should be noted (Kazhdan 1975).

Mary suffered from other disadvantages too. In her early years at court as an imperial bride or bride-elect she was overshadowed by her redoubtable mother-in-law Eudokia Makrembolitissa, wife of Constantine X Doukas, who on her husband's death ruled in her own right, instead of passing the throne over to her son Michael, even though he was technically of age. Eudokia then remarried against the wishes of the court hierarchy, choosing as her consort and emperor the general Romanos Diogenes. Even in the lifetime of her first husband Eudokia promoted an image of imperial collegiality, and was noted for her control of government during her so-called 'regency' for her son. During Romanos's three year reign, too, Michael appears to have played no part in politics, and, at Romanos's defeat by the

Turks at Mantzikert in 1071, Eudokia again considered resuming the reins of government, only to be outmanoeuvred by the Caesar John and her other Doukas in-laws. She was removed to a convent, leaving Michael free to finally assume power. While we do not know the exact date of Mary's marriage, during her first years in the capital (1066/67–71) she was obviously in the shadow of Eudokia, while her agenda must have been markedly different from that of her mother-in-law, who showed no signs of wishing to hand over power to her son and his wife. Especial concern must have been caused by Eudokia's coronation of Romanos's two sons, who might have usurped Michael's power. Mary and Michael were networked with the Caesar John Doukas against Eudokia, which would explain his support of her, rather than Eudokia, when later the usurper Botaneiates was looking for an imperial bride. During her apprenticeship under Eudokia, she must have appreciated the disadvantages under which she was labouring, and the ways in which an empress without family support could still manoeuvre for overt and implicit power.

Once empress, Mary's future was still not secure. Michael's seven years as emperor (1071–78) were marked by inefficiency and neglect of the empire, and the coup d'état of an ambitious and dissatisfied general was only a matter of time. Her son Constantine had been born in 1074 and made co-emperor soon after: his imperial future was to be Mary's main priority.⁵ Later in 1074 Mary saw Constantine betrothed to Olympias, daughter of Robert Guiscard, a suitable imperial bride, who was renamed Helena and brought to Constantinople to be educated by Mary.⁶ Either because Mary's background was an asset to the dynasty, or maybe simply because the trend had been set by Eudokia, Mary appears on Michael's coinage. She is also depicted with Michael on a gold and enamel plaque (7.2 cm x 7 cm), part of the Xaxuli Triptych, now in T'bilisi, on which the inscription reads, 'With my hands I crown Michael with Mariam'; this may have been sent as a gift to Bagrat on the occasion of their coronation (Kalavrezou 1994: 251; Amiranashvili 1972: figs. 8, 9). Psellos's description of Mary during her marriage to Michael (*Chronographia* 7.9; R 2.177; S 372) idealises Mary as empress, by stressing her modesty, beauty and silence. This portrait by a panegyricist of his patron's wife need not be taken at face value, though there is no concrete evidence to the contrary, and nothing which implies that Mary was concerned to see the end of Michael's rule. We need not, for example, accept Matthew of Edessa's story (1.64; Dostourian 1.248) that she hated Michael for his asceticism and had already had an affair with Botaneiates and

⁵ *Alexiad* 3.1.3 (L 1.104; S 104); Psellos 7.12 (R 2.178; S 373); Zonaras 3.714; Leib 1956.

⁶ Skylitzes Cont. 720, 724; *Alexiad* 1.10.2, 1.12.4, 11 (L 1.37, 43, 46; S 53, 57–8, 61); Dölger 1925: 1003. The proposal was put forward in a chrysobull written by Psellos himself: *Scripta Minora* 1.329–34; on Olympias, see Shepard 1988: 100–2; von Falkenhausen 1982: 56–72.

encouraged him to seize the throne. In a manuscript note too the suggestion is made that Mary contributed to Michael's downfall, but her motive is left unexplained (Schreiner 1975: 145).

Acclimatization and Networking within the Byzantine Capital

Apart from her Doukas in-laws, Mary's only main contacts of whom we hear include her 'Alan' cousin Irene ('the daughter of the ruler of Alania'), who was married by Michael to the military aristocrat Isaac Komnenos shortly after Michael's accession. The first of their seven children, John, was born late in 1073 (Varzos 1984: 1.134). According to Anna, Mary herself arranged her cousin's match (Bryennios 143; *Alexiad* 2.1.4). If this cousin was the ex-mistress of Constantine Monomachos, as suggested by Toumanoff (1990: 135), it shows the degree to which relationship with the empress could override a shady past. However, the fact that Isaac Komnenos's wife was still producing children in 1096 (Varzos 1.172) would seem to imply that she was not likely to have been an imperial mistress in the mid 1050s. We may need, therefore, to postulate yet another female cousin of Mary's as part of her family network whom she took with her to Constantinople. A further attendant or relative of Mary's was to become the second wife of Constantine, the grand droungarios (and Tzetzes's grandmother), while the second wife of the general Theodore Gabras, whom he married apparently in 1091 after the death of his first wife Irene, was also a 'most noble' lady from 'Alania', and the cousin of Isaac Komnenos's wife (*Alexiad* 8.9.2; L 2.152; S 265). According to Toumanoff's genealogy (1990: 134–5) this lady was actually Mary's own sister Mariam, and it was this Mariam who was present at her father's deathbed in 1072 (*Chronicle of K'art'li*, Qauxch'ishvili 1955: 314). This was another excellent matrimonial move by Mary, as Gabras was the governor and *de facto* ruler of Trebizond following his recapture of it from the Turks. Even after she was no longer empress-consort, Mary was clearly skilled at marrying the relatives who had accompanied her to Constantinople into influential families and creating her own network of contacts. In addition, one of the close friends and advisors of Botaneiates was to be an 'Alan' – perhaps one of Mary's retinue and promoted under her influence – while it was a magistros, an 'Alan' by birth, who was to inform the Komnenoi of the plot against them and precipitate Botaneiates's downfall (*Alexiad* 1.16.2–3, 2.3.4, 2.4.5; L 1.57–8, 70, 72–3; S 70, 79–80). In addition, her rank enabled her to win the support of courtiers by the creation of a quasi-familial relationship, as she did by standing as godparent for Psellos's grandson.

Of the matches found for her 'ladies', the most prestigious was that with Isaac Komnenos, the eldest son of a powerful and wealthy military family, dominated by the ambitious matriarch, Anna Dalassene. She resented the

events of 1059, when her brother-in-law Isaac I Komnenos's abdicated and permitted Constantine X Doukas to gain power, although there seems to have been no serious rival to Constantine Doukas (Psellos 7.83, 89 (R 2.133–4, 136–7; S 326, 329); Bryennios 81–5). Clearly Anna Dalassene realized the value of an alliance between her son and the empress's cousin, and possibly recognized in Mary a determination similar to her own. When Mary feared for the future of her son Constantine under Botaneiates, it was Anna who suggested a pretext to Isaac for visiting Mary (his wife's cousin) with his brother Alexios, and persuading her to discuss her concerns over the succession (*Alexiad* 2.2.2; L 1.67: S 76). Whatever the ambitions of the Komnenoi at the end of Michael's reign, Mary did well out of the events of 1078. The successful general who was proclaimed on 7 January 1078 and entered Constantinople on 3 April (Michael had fled to a monastery at the end of March and was later to be made bishop of Ephesos) was the elderly Nikephoros Botaneiates.

Mary turned the situation to her own advantage. On Michael's abdication, she sheltered in the Petrion monastery with her son Constantine, but significantly did not take the veil, waiting on events (Bryennios 253; cf. Skylitzes Cont. 178). Nikephoros's second wife Vevdene fortunately died shortly after his accession (Skylitzes Cont. 181–2), in time for him to legitimize his take-over by an imperial marriage, perhaps in early 1079. There were a number of candidates, and Mary, her mother-in-law Eudokia Makrembolitissa, and Eudokia's daughter Zoe were in competition for the position, together with all the unmarried girls of the capital. Although her husband was still alive, it was Mary who received the decisive support of her Doukas in-laws, especially that of the Caesar John Doukas, Michael's uncle, whose advice to Botaneiates, stressing her beauty and lack of connections in Byzantium, carried the day – this despite the fact that Botaneiates's first choice seems to have been Eudokia, who had to be dissuaded by a monk named Panaretos from remarrying: 'being reminded of many things that could put an end to her eagerness'. Presumably Panaretos was referring to her oath to her first husband, Constantine X, that she would not remarry after his death – and she was also a nun (Skylitzes Cont. 181–2). Bryennios tells us that even at the last moment, when a priest refused to perform the ceremony of marrying Mary and Botaneiates, John Doukas was afraid that the bridegroom's thoughts would turn again to Eudokia, who as empress would not have favoured John, her erstwhile brother-in-law: Botaneiates had recalled Eudokia from exile together with her children by Diogenes and restored her possessions, as well as ensuring her a luxurious income (Attaleiates 304). Doukas had the priest, says Bryennios, gently removed and another substituted, and hence acquired his great influence (*παρορησία*) over Mary. Botaneiates's marriage to Mary was considered both 'trigamous' and

adulterous, except by the historian Attaleiates, whose account favours the new emperor. According to Bryennios (253–5), Botaneiates's wife Vevdene was still alive, which would have made the marriage doubly adulterous. What is significant is that Mary, though not a widow, was willing to marry Nikephoros and alienate both clergy and patriarch through this 'adulterous' marriage. Michael's retirement to a monastery had been forced, not voluntary, and hence any divorce and remarriage by his wife was invalid (Kalavrezou 1994: 249; Laiou 1992b: 173–5); on these grounds the priest who celebrated it was deposed. Bryennios mentions that the marriage was illegal (a third marriage was only permissible by canon law if one were childless); the historian Attaleiates, who is concerned to show Botaneiates's reign in a good light, does not mention the marriage, which is in itself evidence for its illegality.⁷ By flouting convention, Mary secured the position of both her son and herself, and the fact that she had to work outside the bounds of canon law to achieve security was a direct result of her lack of family support. It can not now be determined whether the suggestion that she should marry Botaneiates originated with herself (Hill 1996a: 44), though presumably Doukas, who obviously had the interests of Constantine, his great-nephew, at heart, ascertained her willingness to comply if the offer were made, which may perhaps suggest that she was a willing participant in the intrigue.

As wife (not widow) of Michael VII and thus the ex-empress, Mary was accordingly the legitimizing factor of Botaneiates's reign, and at the age of perhaps 27 (if born c. 1052) became empress for the second time. Her role was demonstrated by her appearance on his silver coinage and busts of the two appear on the reverse of a *miliaresion* whose obverse bears the inscription 'Nikephoros and Maria, faithful *basileis* of the Romaioi' (Grierson 1973: 829; Morrisson 1970: 655–6). In addition, one of the illustrations in the Coislin MS of the *Homilies* of John Chrysostom in Paris presents Christ blessing Mary and Botaneiates. The codex was being made for Michael at the time of his abdication, and after some alterations it was presented to Nikephoros instead (Spatharakis 1976: 107–18; Kalavrezou 1994: 249). The imperial couple are shown as equal in size, in full regalia. However, despite her public role in the iconography of his reign, Mary was unable to persuade Botaneiates to nominate Constantine, her son by Michael, as his successor: instead Nikephoros preferred his own young relative Nikephoros Synadenos, though Constantine was allowed to wear silk shoes of various colours, but not the imperial purple (*Alexiad* 2.2.1, 3.4.5; L 1.66, 115; S 75, 113). Nevertheless, there was no open break, despite Mary's attempts to promote her son's position and Constantine's loss of rank. She had received

⁷ *Alexiad* 3.2.3–5 (L 1.107–8; S 106–7); Bryennios 251–5; Skylitzes Cont. 177–8, 181–2; Zonaras 3.722; cf. Michael Syr. 15.5 (Chabot 3.176); Grumel 1989: 910; Leib 1950; Laiou 1992b: 172–3, 1992c: 123.

the prime Constantinopolitan estates of the Mangana palace and monastery and the Hebdomon monastery by chrysobull from Botaneiates, and was thus extremely rich (Zonaras 3.733; *Alexiad* 3.4.5, L 1.115; S 113). As a sign of his close connection with the imperial family, Botaneiates near the end of his reign (c. 1081) granted Mary's brother, the Georgian ruler Giorgi II, the high-ranking dignity of Caesar. Giorgi had previously held the ranks of kouropalates (as heir), nobilissimos, and then sebastos (Rapp 1997: 567–70). Furthermore, Anna (1.16.2–3; L 1.57–8; S 70) shows Botaneiates at approximately this period discussing the loyalty of his *dux* of Illyricum (George Monomachatos) in front of Mary ('I suspect this Monomachatos of being an enemy of the Roman Empire'). This was reported to Monomachatos by John 'an Alan', who was his friend and had heard the remark; he advised him to consult his interests (leading to negotiations with Alexios and his eventual defection). It is impossible not to see Mary's quarters in the palace as a centre of intrigue and clearing-house for seditious information.

Anna explains Mary's subsequent actions as a direct result of this decision regarding the succession: if Botaneiates had left the throne to Constantine 'he would have ensured his own safety to the end ... the empress, moreover, would have had more confidence in him; she would have been more loyal. The old man did not realize the unfairness and inexpediency of his plans, unaware that he was bringing evil on his own head'. This threat to Constantine's future led Mary to use her manipulative finesse, utilizing and extending the network formed by her cousin Irene's marriage connection, Isaac Komnenos, and her own Doukas contacts. The marriage in 1078 of Isaac's brother Alexios to Irene Doukaina, Michael VII's first cousin once removed, consolidated the two halves of her support group and encouraged them to act together (even if the Caesar John Doukas and Anna Dalassene were not on speaking terms). Bryennios speaks of Anna's 'ancient hatred' towards the Caesar and his family (221; cf. *Alexiad* 3.2.1 L 1. 106; S 105). As noted above, Anna Dalassene realized the advantage of the empress's support and suggested a pretext which would enable Isaac and Alexios to visit Mary (*Alexiad* 2.2.1–2; L 1.66–7; S 75–6). In a classic example of the freedom of movement allowed to ladies of the aristocracy at this period (Garland 1988: 381–3), Anna was also to be very much involved in her sons' coup (*Alexiad* 2.5.1–9; L 1.75–9; S 83–6). The Komnenoi brothers Isaac and Alexios plotted a revolt, which Mary encouraged. She adopted Alexios, who was not so much younger than herself (he was born c. 1057), as her son – even though his own mother was very much alive – so that he could have constant access to her. Her aim in this intrigue was to have Constantine reinstated as emperor and to this end she welcomed the private visits of Alexios and Isaac (*Alexiad* 2.2.2–3, 3.1.2, cf. 3.2.6; L 1.67–8, 104, 109; S 76,

103–4, 108). She was supposedly persuaded to the adoption by officials of the women's quarters, on the advice of Isaac, her cousin's husband. The process made Alexios and Constantine adoptive brothers, and Isaac and Alexios swore to preserve Constantine's rights as emperor.⁸ In some ways she masterminded the conspiracy against her own husband and emperor: Isaac and Alexios needed her support against their enemies and her information may have precipitated their revolt – the brothers were informed in the depths of night of the plot against them by a *magistros*, an 'Alan' by birth, who was one of the emperor's friends and a courtier of long-standing. It was rumoured that Mary was not unaware of his mission, suggesting that her network had penetrated the emperor's closest advisers, some of whom – her countrymen – may have attained their position through her influence (*Alexiad* 2.3.4, 2.4.5; L 1.70, 72–3; S 79, 80).

Her strategies were to pay off. Whatever happened Mary's position was secure: if Isaac became emperor she was the empress's cousin; if Alexios became emperor she was his adopted mother, even apart from the possibility, which she may have had in mind, of marrying him. Botaneiates abdicated on 1 April 1081, and Alexios, the fortunate brother due to the Caesar John Doukas's support, moved into the palace with Mary and was crowned on 4 April, without his wife Irene Doukaina, who was left with her own relatives in the 'lower' palace. Irene was only crowned a week later after pressure from the patriarch, the fleet, and her Doukas relatives. It is possible that Anna Dalassene, who disliked Alexios's young wife (and Irene was as yet childless), had done a deal with Mary, that she be empress for the third time. This became inoperable when the patriarch Kosmas refused to co-operate. It should be remembered that as 'syntechnoi', co-parents of Alexios, the two women – parent and godparent – shared an important bond (Macrides 1987: 143–4). Mary's success with Botaneiates had perhaps led her to think that she could evade the rules of canon law yet again, and this despite the fact that her marriage to Alexios would also have been illegal because his brother Isaac was married to her cousin (Laiou 1992c: 49). In addition, not only Botaneiates but Michael VII was still alive (he died c. 1090). Whether Mary and Alexios were at this point having an affair, as perhaps is suggested by Zonaras in his salacious comment (3.747) that as a young man Alexios 'was given to affairs of the heart', is best left to the imagination, though Anna Komnene is at pains to whitewash the events of early April 1081 (3.1.2–4; L 1.104–5; S 103–5). Anna explicitly states (3.1.2) that the Komnenoi refused to drive Mary from the palace, because of the many kindnesses they had received from her as empress and because of their close relationship, while Mary herself was reluctant to leave because of her

⁸ *Alexiad* 2.1.4–6, 2.2.2–3, 2.3.4 (L 1.64–8, 70; S 74–9); cf. Bryennios 259, who dates the adoption to early in Botaneiates' reign. On the adoption, see Macrides 1990: 117; 1987.

lonely position: 'she was in a foreign country, without relatives, without friends, with nobody whatever of her own folk.' Certainly the Caesar John Doukas, who now preferred to see his niece Irene on the throne, had to arrange for Mary's unwilling departure from the palace, demanding that the patriarch refuse to listen to any of Mary's arguments and instead support the Doukas faction (3.2.3; L 1.107; S 106). Anna Dalassene appears to have eventually come to an agreement with the patriarch, and been prepared to countenance Irene Doukaina as her son's wife, in order to gain the removal of Kosmas in favour of the new patriarch, her protégé Eustratios Garidas (*Alexiad* 3.2.6–7, 3.4.4 (L 109–10, 115; S 108–9, 112); cf. Bryennios 221; Zonaras 3.734; Angold 1995: 46). If Anna's plotting seems out of character for a Byzantine matron, we only have to consider the actions of the mother of Irene Doukaina, Maria the protovestiaría, a lady of Bulgarian descent. When her son-in-law George Palaiologos met the rebels at the monastery of Kosmidion, not far from Blachernae, and declined to join them, Maria insisted, with the most awful threats that he should do so. From that point on he was one of the Doukas faction's most committed supporters (*Alexiad* 2.6.2; L 1.80; S 86).

Though Mary was not Alexios I's wife, she was his 'mother', and her son his adoptive brother. Her manoeuvres had once again been successful: Constantine was restored to his rightful position as co-emperor, and, on the advice of John Doukas, Mary had Alexios guarantee her safety and that of her child and issue a chrysobull confirming Constantine's imperial privileges. Only then did she leave the imperial palace for her own dwelling, the Mangana palace, with full retinue and the escort of Isaac, the new emperor's elder brother. Her political acumen was shown by the fact that as co-emperor Constantine even outranked Isaac, who was given the rank of *sebastokrator*. Constantine's signature was appended to documents of state in purple ink, and he followed after Alexios in processions and was acclaimed after him; soon after the birth of Anna Komnene, Alexios's eldest child, in December 1083, he was betrothed to her and the two were named as heirs-apparent (*Alexiad* 3.4.6, 6.8.3 (L 1.115–16, 2.62; S 113, 197); Zonaras 3.733; Bryennios pref. 8 (Gautier, 65–7); cf. Dölger 1925: 1064; Zonaras 3.738; see Smythe in this volume). Theophylact in his *Paideia Basilike* (Or. 4), written between 1081 and 1087 and probably close to 1086, refers to Constantine as an emperor, 'basileus'. Anna was put into Mary's care before she was eight years old (*Alexiad* 3.1.4; L 1.105; S 105) and Mary, as her future mother-in-law, was to bring her up with Constantine, according to Byzantine custom. From c. 1090 until, apparently, Constantine's death, perhaps in 1095/96, Anna lived with her. She stresses that Mary was very fond of her and shared all her secrets with her.

Mary as Empress-mother

In addition to her property within Constantinople, Mary possessed extensive property outside the city in an area which had suitably Georgian connections. Her son Constantine had a large estate at Pentegostis in Thrace, near Serres, 'a delightful place with a good supply of cold, drinkable water and apartments big enough to receive an emperor as guest', while Mary enjoyed estates called Petritzos (Petriconi in Georgian) and Pernikos not far from Christoupolis (Kavala) (*Alexiad* 9.5.5; L 2.171–2; S 279): Petritzos actually lies between the Georgian monastery of Theotokos Petritzonissa and the city Stenimachos (in southern Bulgaria), just a few kilometres from each. The Petritzonissa (modern Bachkovo) monastery was founded just south of Philippopolis in 1083 by Gregory Pakourianos (Georgian: Bakuriani), a general of Armeno-Georgian ancestry, for the use of 50 Georgian monks, primarily family members and retired soldiers who had served in his army: Anna speaks highly of the Alans' fighting qualities as part of the empire's army (13.6.2; L 3.108; S 411). Pakourianos himself had major holdings both near Philippopolis and north of Mosynopolis on Mount Papikion (Lemerle 1977: 177, 179–80). Perhaps we should note that Pakourianos had been one of the most enthusiastic supporters of Alexios's coup, which might suggest that Georgian connections in the capital were actively mobilized behind Alexios (*Alexiad* 2.4.6–7; L 1.73–4; S 81). He was proud of his connections with both Alexios and Isaac and of his status as Grand Domestic of the West and sebastos (Galatariotou 1987: 90). Pakourianos died without heirs in 1086 and was buried at his monastery; his family was also noted for its support of the Georgian Iviron monastery on Mount Athos (*Synodikon* 38, 111; Lefort et al: 1990: 5, 7). Significantly, in the typikon of his monastery (chs. 24–5; Gautier 1984: 29) Pakourianos specified that no 'Roman' monks or priests should be admitted, on the grounds that the Greeks were 'violent by nature, deceitful, and grasping' and might take control of the institution and turn it into their property; 'Iberians' – 'who are near to us by blood' – are to be given preference over other foreigners. Moreover, all monks are to be able to understand written and spoken Georgian (ch. 1). As Ostrogorsky notes, Pakourianos, even after a brilliant career in the imperial service, felt himself to be an alien in Byzantine circles and viewed Greeks with suspicion.⁹

⁹ Ostrogorsky 1971: 30–1; Ostrogorsky points out (n. 113) that a similar attitude occurs in the Life of Sts John and Euthymios, founders of the Iviron monastery, where the 'Greeks' are criticised for trying to extirpate the Georgians from the monastery; cf. Lemerle 1977: 185–6, 'il lui a donné un caractère essentiellement national, au point d'en exclure tout Grec'. For a translation of Gregory Pakourianos's *Typikon*, see Pakourianos 2000 (also available at *Dumbarton Oaks etexts* at <http://www.doaks.org/etexts.html>).

Prior to 1088, Mary used her role as the emperor's adopted mother to great advantage. Even when Alexios had a son, John, on 13 September 1087, who was crowned at his baptism, he was not publicly proclaimed as co-emperor until 1092, when Constantine was 18 years of age. On the other hand, a speech by Theophylact in 1088 (*Or.* 5, 235) reproaches Alexios for not having crowned John and does not mention Constantine, which presumably means that he was no longer co-emperor or that at least winds of change were sweeping through the court (Theophylact was Mary's especial protégé). Furthermore, Anna (6.8.3; L 2.62; S 197) speaks of the public acclamations of herself and Constantine as heirs-apparent as something which she does not personally remember, which implies that they might have been discontinued c. 1088, when she was four or five years of age. However, though John was clearly seen as Alexios's heir, Constantine's engagement to Anna continued until his death in or after 1094, after which she married Nikephoros Bryennios: they were certainly married in April 1097 (*Alexiad* 9.5.4, 10.9.6 (L 2.171, 223; S 279, 320); Polemis 1968: 62 n.17; Bryennios 65–7; Zonaras 3.738). According to Bryennios, this demotion in rank was due to Constantine's suffering a serious illness, which eventually led to his death, actually more than six years later (Bryennios 65–7). Of course, it was unrealistic to imagine that Alexios would support Constantine's rights over those of his own son: Choniates has Alexios say, in the context of the empress Irene's nagging him to leave his throne to his daughter Anna and her husband Bryennios, that everyone would laugh at him and imagine that he had gone mad if he chose a son-in-law to succeed him before a son (Choniates 5–6). Nevertheless Alexios remained on very friendly terms with Mary and Constantine.

In the summer of 1094 Alexios was on campaign and went to visit Constantine at his estate at Pentegostis; in this context Anna emphasises Alexios's affection for Constantine, as well as the young prince's delicate health. Still, while Constantine may have been treated by Alexios as his son, he was not. The change in Constantine's fortunes naturally affected Mary, and despite more than a decade of honourable status under the Komnenoi she continued to do battle on behalf of his imperial status. From the account of Anna Komnene Mary seems to have been involved in an assassination attempt against Alexios by Nikephoros Diogenes in early 1094 (the assassination was to take place in Constantine's villa, and Diogenes seemed sure of Mary's support). Mary is said to have taken an interest in Diogenes because he was her first husband's half-brother (son of the empress Eudokia and Romanos Diogenes), and Anna carefully states that when Diogenes was arrested documents were found on him which made it clear that Mary knew of the conspiracy, though she disapproved of the plan to murder Alexios and was trying to dissuade Diogenes from it. Her involvement in the plot must

have stemmed from what she saw as Constantine's loss of imperial rank. Alexios, however, continued to look after Mary's interests, and no action was taken against her (*Alexiad* 9.5.5, 9.7.2, 9.8.2 (L 2.171, 175, 178–9; S 279–80, 283, 285); Cheynet 1990: 98; cf. Mullett 1984b.).

Like so many imperial women, she may have been encouraged to remove herself to a convent, perhaps after Constantine's death (i.e., between 1094 and 1097), but, despite Zonaras 3.722–23, there is no evidence that her becoming a nun or eventual removal to a convent, was anything other than her own choice. She may have acknowledged that with her son's death her imperial ambitions had reached a dead end and retired perhaps to the Prince's Islands, where Theophylact wrote to her in 1095 (*Ep.* 4). At the time of Diogenes's conspiracy in 1094 she was probably not much more than 40 years of age, if that, and she was clearly still alive in 1103 when the Georgian synod at Ruisi-Urbnisi offered her greetings.

There is, however, an alternative, and in many ways more satisfactory site suggested for her retirement: her stay on the Prince's Islands may simply have been part of a visit to one of the monasteries or the imperial palace there. Recent excavations at Mount Papikion on the southern slopes of the Rhodope mountains north of Mosynopolis, approximately 100 kilometres from the Theotokos Petritzonitissa monastery and in an area where Pakourianos had extensive properties, have uncovered an extensive monastic complex dating from the mid-eleventh century, in which the donor portraits in the main church depict a mother and son. Near the north wall was discovered a grave containing clothing with silver threads and a gold signet ring with the negative inscription: '(Of) Maria Botoniatina' (ΜΑΡΗΑ ΒΟΤΩΝΙΑΘΝΑ). Zekos (1998) suggests that here we have discovered the original burial place of the empress in a complex which she herself and her son Constantine founded. The spelling is not an issue: it was not uncommon for Botanciates to be spelt Botonciates (or Botoneciotes) in Georgian documents (Mikaberidze 1998: 134). The site – near her own estates and the foundation of Pakourianos – would have been particularly appropriate for an ex-empress of Georgian background. It is tempting to speculate whether Mary's body was still *in situ* at the time of the Third Crusade. The approach of Frederick Barbarossa's army in the autumn of 1189 triggered the burying of a hoard of 786 nomismata (the Gornoslav hoard) by the monks of Theotokos Petritzonitissa at Bachkovo, while the abbot of the monastery was 'persuaded' to accompany Frederick on his crusade (Hendy 1983) – the time was clearly one of uncertainty and danger, when all precious possessions were securely hidden or removed. If Mary's remains had not already been taken to Constantinople, it was doubtless on this occasion that they were removed.

Mary as Monastic and Literary Patron

From 1081 until 1088, Mary was comfortably accommodated in the Mangana palace, originally built by Constantine IX Monomachos, with an alternative court and the reputation of being both a literary lady and patron of authors and theologians; the pious and devoted mother of the young emperor as well as mother-in-law elect of the emperor's eldest daughter. It was during this period that Mary was the patron of Theophylact of Ochrid, Constantine's tutor (who became Archbishop of Bulgaria in 1088/9), and Eustratios of Nicaea (a western-influenced pupil of John Italos). Theophylact wrote at least one letter to her: the 'despoina' of letter 107 may be Mary, or perhaps Irene Doukaina (Mullett 1997: 96, 196), while his letter 4 to Mary when on Prinkipo (*Ep.* 2.131–42), perhaps accompanying a gift of incense, is an intimate and literary tour-de-force on the discomforts of his journey back to Ochrid. In this letter which displays their relationship of patronage even c. 1095, he apologises for failing to say goodbye to her when he was in Constantinople. Theophylact praises her piety and love of theology in his *Paideia Basilike* (*Or.* 4.191.15–22) on the education of her son Constantine: is there, he asks, any volume, however long or difficult, that has escaped her notice? Theophylact's *Paideia Basilike* may well have been delivered as an oral presentation in the court of the Mangana palace, as there is no reference in it to the emperor Alexios, as would be expected had it been delivered at the imperial court. Mary, therefore, may be assumed to have had a literary circle at which readings of appropriate works were delivered to her and her retinue.

One such would have been the piece by Eustratios of Nicaea dedicated 'to my lady Mary of Alania' – a meteorological-cum-cosmographical-cum-geographical-cum-astronomical treatise, which begins 'You have questioned me, my lady, on the nature of thunder and lightning'. In it he promises to explain these and other natural forces as clearly as he can to the best of his ability. This treatise, which shows a heavy dependence on Aristotle and the 'Phaenomena' of Aratos, attempts to explain natural forces in line with Christian cosmogony (Polesso Schiavon 1965–66), making clear that God is the prime cause of all such phenomena, but attempting to provide a scientific explanation for them within this framework. While in many cases it is possible that works were dedicated regardless of their patrons' literary or intellectual tastes, in this case it seems clear that the treatise was written at Mary's direction; paralleling the opening address, the final sentence in the second person singular exhorts her to pay attention, take note, and not forget, and the occasional question-and-answer structure may well be in response to questions she had put to Eustratios on various topics. In simplistic, and often repetitive language, the treatise touches on such matters as: 'On thunder and lightning', 'on the dimensions of the earth', 'on

stadia and miles', 'on the distance between the sky and the earth', 'on earthquakes', 'on the elements', 'on the antipodes', 'on the four seas', 'on pearls', 'on the firmament', and 'on stars', i.e., the zodiac. Questions are posed – and answered – as to why we see lightning before we hear the corresponding thunder (40–4), whether men and animals walk upside down under the earth (146–61), and how pearls are created. These are explained by the effect of lightning in the Red Sea on oysters' eyes, on the analogy of the Theotokos conceiving Christ the 'true' pearl (219–40). 'Alania' (and in another case Iberia) twice gets a mention as a geographical parameter of two of the four seas (246–56) giving the work another frame of reference for the empress.

Schiavon (285–6) has noted the similarity of some of the types of speculation between this treatise and those written by Michael Psellos – his *de omnifaria doctrina* and the *solutiones quaedam ad imperatorem Michaellem Ducam*, and this quasi-scientific interest may have been typical of the court milieu of the time. Eustratios also wrote an anti-Latin polemical treatise, of which the Georgian version is extant – perhaps both written and translated at Mary's instance (Alexidze 1991: 210). Mary was also a supporter of the philosopher John Italos, whose group Alexios repressed at the beginning of his reign in 1082.¹⁰ On one occasion Italos addressed a brief essay to 'the Abasgian grammarian' who had criticized two grammatical errors in John's work. It is tempting to identify this Georgian, whose Greek is clearly superior to that of Italos and with whom Italos was on friendly terms, as John Petrici (Petritsi), the famous Georgian neo-Platonist and a pupil of Michael Psellos's, who is said to have translated into Georgian Proclus's *Elements of Theology*, Nemesius's *De natura hominis* and two texts of Aristotle (the τὰ τοπικά and περὶ ἐρμηνείας).¹¹ Such a scholar, in the circles of both Italos and Psellos, who were more than tangentially connected with Mary, would certainly have been known to her in her earlier years as empress in Byzantium and been part of her patronage network.

Theophylact also wrote at her request his commentaries on the gospels of Mark and Luke and the lesser prophets (PG 123.487–1126; 126.559–1190). *Vind. Theol. Gr.* 90, which contains his Gospel Commentaries, appears to be an autograph presentation copy to Mary (Mullett 1997: 243; Lemerle 1977: 97 n.73). The dedication to Maria reads:

¹⁰ Browning 1975: 3–23; Clucas 1981: 91. For Mary's role as literary patroness, see Mullett (1984a) 177–8, (1984b) 205–6; for Irene Doukaina's 'salon', see Michael Italikos, *Epp.* 11, 15; Gautier 1972: 146–7; Polemis 1968: 72–3.

¹¹ P. Joannou, *Ioannes Italos: Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, Ettal, 1956, *Quaestio* 64; Tarchnishvili 1955: 211–25; cf. Marr 1909; Wilson 1983: 155, 164. Khintibidze 1996: 70–1 also identifies Petrici with the 'Abasgian grammarian'. While Petrici, an excellent Greek scholar, is also generally credited with the translation into Georgian of Josephus' *Antiquities*, the Georgian text contains too many translation errors for this to be feasible: Melik'ishvili 1988: 545–8.

Τῆς βασιλίσσης ἐννόημα Μαρίας,
 ψυχῆς ἀληθῶς ἔργον εὐγενεστάτης,
 ὁ δὲ τρυγῆσας τοὺς μελλιῤῥύτους λόγους
 Θεοφυλάκτος ποιμενάρχης Βουλγαρίας (*PG* 123.35).

(Theophylact, leading shepherd of Bulgaria, has harvested these words which flow with honey for the consideration of the Empress Maria, truly a work for a most noble soul).

The date at which these commentaries might have been written is unknown, but clearly after 1088: for what it is worth, Theophylact's commentary on the Acts of the Apostles can be dated to either 1097 or 1108 (Theophylact, 1.37, n.40). If his other commentaries were composed at the same time, these would show that Mary's active literary patronage continued even after Constantine's death and her own retirement.

Mary's position was in no way altered by her becoming a nun, like Anna Dalassene, the emperor's mother. Mary had certainly taken the veil at the time the *Paideia Basilike* was delivered, for Theophylact plays on her austere clothing and ascetic lifestyle (*Or.* 4; Gautier 1.187), while Zonaras (3.722–3) mentions her having taken the veil in the context of her visit to Michael VII at his deathbed, c. 1090, when she asked his pardon for marrying Botaneiates. Theophylact, however, makes clear that Mary at the Mangana palace was not in any way secluded: she sees suppliants on a daily basis, is beneficent to orphans and the hungry, acts extensively as a patron of monastic institutions, and maintains her rank as empress. Mary may have had some influence over Alexios, after his accession, in matters of his personal benefactions, if only indirectly. The Orphanotropheion, or 'orphanage', which he founded in the 1090s, appears to have contained four monasteries, three for women, including one for Georgian nuns: 'the work of the deaconesses was also carefully organized and he devoted much thought to Iberian nuns who lived there; in former times it was their custom to beg from door to door whenever they visited Constantinople, but now, thanks to my father's solicitude, an enormous convent was built for them and they were provided with food and suitable clothing' (*Alexiad* 15.7.8; L 3.217; S 494–5; cf. Zonaras 3.744–5). In 1060–65, Bagrat IV and the Georgian Athonite Giorgi Mt'acmideli together reformed the Georgian Church; Giorgi also had a long-standing association with Bagrat's mother Mariam. This close cooperation might suggest that Giorgi's monastic companions (Giorgi died in 1065) would have taken a special interest in Mary while she was resident in Constantinople (Khintibidze 1996: 61).

Among Mary's monastic donations, she made financial contributions to the monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos (Lefort et al: 1990: 8, 33), and with her mother Borena built a convent named Kappatha at Jerusalem (Nodia 1978: 142; Mikaberidze 1998: 149). It was natural for Mary, among her

benefactions, to take an interest in the Iviron monastery, which had been founded by John (Ioanne) Tornik at the end of the tenth century and had since received a great deal of imperial patronage. Both Theodora and Constantine X had shown an interest in it, Constantine in June 1065 promulgating two chrysobulls in favour of Iviron, one relating to Georgian orphans, the other confirming monastery privileges. Michael VII probably, and Nikephoros Botaneiates certainly continued these privileges; Michael is commemorated in the *Synodikon* at no. 107 (Lefort et al: 1990: 7). This interest in Iviron may well have been due to Mary's influence, though it should be noted that Botaneiates, as duke of Thessaloniki in 1061 and 1062, had already been concerned with its affairs (Lefort et al: 1990: no. 33–5). A chrysobull of Botaneiates, dated to July 1079, re-establishes a payment of 4 lbs of gold and 16 nomismata which had been neglected under Michael VII. In this document (no. 41), important new privileges are conferred: the monastery is no longer accountable to the duke of Thessaloniki, but answers to the logothete of the dromos in Constantinople, or his protonotarios. The monastery was also allowed to choose its own abbot.

Mary and her son Constantine, like Bagrat IV and Mariam, were among the monastery's outstanding beneficiaries (*Synodikon* 133), and they were commemorated on 21 November for their support for the monastery: they had liberated Iviron from the demands of the *sekretion* (a government department) and enabled the monastery to reacquire some property. Furthermore they had intervened in favour of Iviron during the reign of Alexios I, and given 6 lbs of gold to distribute to the monks. The intervention on behalf of the other 'proasteia and Melitzianos' appears to refer to a quarrel with regard to the ownership of a number of properties in which they championed Iviron.

Bagratid Women as Models for Mary 'of Alania'

This princess with few relatives, friends, or contacts in Constantinople had the distinction of appearing on the coinage of two husbands, 'legitimated' the accession of one emperor, Nikephoros, and then actively intrigued in orchestrating the coup of another against him. She had seen Constantine, her son by Michael VII, honoured as the heir-apparent under the new regime, even taking precedence over the males of the reigning Komnenos family, and had herself become the adoptive mother of the new emperor. An active political force in Constantinople for some twenty years, she may even have set the fashion for literary patronage among imperial women. Perhaps she was following in the steps of her mother-in-law Eudokia Makrembolitissa. Another attractive alternative is that, consciously or otherwise, she was importing a Georgian stance into her attitude towards Byzantine politics,

particularly modelling herself on her paternal grandmother Mariam, who had a long history of involvement in Georgian politics.

By the late tenth century and certainly by the eleventh, the Bagratids envisaged themselves as forming a radical break with the Georgian past. This break in Georgian historiography is clear enough (Rapp 2001). Extant pre-Bagratid sources, all three of which were written on the eve of Bagratid rule, have a blatantly Persian context and flavour. Thus, the Christian Vaxtang is described as a Christian hero-king much like those of Sasanid Persia. We lack historical sources from the early Bagratid period, so we can only speculate as to the attitude of those Bagratids to the pre-Bagratid past. Nevertheless, Toumanoff has conclusively demonstrated that the early Georgian Bagratids were not – and probably did not regard themselves as – the radical break that they would later portray themselves to be (Toumanoff 1963: 192sq.). Extant manuscripts of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* prove beyond any doubt that pre-Bagratid historical sources continued to be transmitted in Bagratid times. But because the oldest surviving redaction of the corpus was copied in the last quarter of the fifteenth century,¹² we may only speculate about the frequency of manuscripts in the pre-Bagratid period. Furthermore, it is virtually impossible to discern who might have been familiar with their contents. This is especially true in terms of pre-Bagratid texts, for if the Bagratids – who had risen to power under the tutelage of Constantinople – came to see themselves as unconnected to the Persian-flavoured K'art'velian past, we must wonder if a Bagratid princess like Mary would have been acquainted with the traditions of pre-Bagratid women like Sagduxt, the mother of King Vaxtang I Gorgasali (r. 447–522) and the most prominent woman encountered in Georgian historiography before the time of Mary (*Life of Vaxtang* 144–5).

Some of the most influential models of prominent women in medieval Georgian literature belong to the sphere of hagiography, perhaps the most popular genre of literature in Georgia prior to the Mongol conquest of the thirteenth century. The oldest Georgian-language work chronicling the works of Nino, the fourth-century illuminatrix of K'art'li, is the brief *Conversion of K'art'li*, the core text of the tenth-century ecclesiastical corpus called *Mok'ceay k'art'lisay*. The *Conversion* was originally composed in the seventh century by an anonymous author and was reworked in the early Bagratid period, in the ninth/tenth century. The resultant, considerably longer and embellished tradition about Nino is titled *The Life of Nino*. Its popularity is demonstrated by the fact that two closely related versions of it were incorporated into *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, the pre-eminent historical corpus,

¹² The oldest extant redaction of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* is a copy of the medieval Armenian adaptation that was produced between 1274 and 1311; Thomson (1996) has translated both this Armenian adaptation (called *Patmut'wn Vrac'*) and the critical Georgian text.

and *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*, a prominent collection of ecclesiastical texts. In addition, numerous references to Nino (for example, *Life of the Kings* 64, 71; *Life of Vaxtang* 163, 167, 197) and even metaphrases of the *Life of Nino* occur widely in medieval Georgian ecclesiastical literature. Quite obviously, Nino was one of the towering figures of the history of Christianity in the Georgian lands and she was officially sanctioned by the Church. Therefore, Nino was a figure with whom an elite K'art'velian – especially one living in the Bagratid epoch – would have been intimately familiar.

The Life of Nino is a tale of a captive woman, a native of the Roman province of Cappadocia in nearby Anatolia, who propagated Christianity just north of the Mtkuari (Kura) River in Caucasia. Unique among Georgian-language sources, including the hagiographical celebrations of the holy women Shushaniki and the seventeenth-century K'et'evan, the *dramatis personae* in the *Life of Nino* are predominantly women. In other words, the *Life of Nino* is, inter alia, a celebration of the role of women in Christian Caucasia. The image of Nino as a foreign woman playing a pivotal role in history must have struck a chord with Georgian women like Mary 'of Alania' who occupied positions of power.

Georgian traditions about Nino were quite popular from the tenth century onwards; numerous written traditions supplemented what must have been rich oral ones. There can be no question that the model of Nino would have appealed to a woman like Mary 'of Alania', also a stranger in a strange land. Not only was Nino an exemplary Christian, but her success depended directly upon other women. This dependence was amplified by her foreign status. As a Georgian, there can be little doubt that Mary was intimately familiar with the Nino cycle that became particularly popular beginning in the ninth and tenth centuries. Yet we do not have any direct evidence that, as part of her sponsorship of Byzantine literature, Mary ordered the copying of the *Life of Nino* or some related text. It should be noted that there are indications that some medieval Georgians were uncomfortable that a woman was responsible for the conversion of K'art'li. Thus, in the twelfth-century the *katholikos* Nikoloz Gulaberidze devotes over fifty pages of a homily explaining why God had entrusted this crucial episode to a woman.¹³ Ironically, just a few decades later, in 1184, the Bagratid T'amar would ascend the throne and become the first woman to rule, in her own right, as the queen of a unified Georgian realm. Eastmond (1994: 290–93) argues that the later Queen T'amar revived the cult of Nino so as to buttress her position, though Mary may also have served as a model. There can be

¹³ Horn 1998: 261. The homily in question was dedicated to Sueti-c'xoveli, the cathedral of the *kat' alikos* in Mc'xet'a: Karbelashvili 1908; see also Sabinin 1990: 69–117.

absolutely no question that Mary would have known about Nino, whom the local church honored as a hero of the brightest magnitude.¹⁴

Only two Bagratid-era histories were composed prior to the lifetime of Mary. Sumbat Davit'is-dze's terse *History and Tale of the Georgian Bagratids* is part of the corpus *K'art'lis c'xovreba* and enshrines the rise of the Georgian Bagratids from their appropriated ancestor the King-Prophet David. Davit'is-dze subsequently traces Bagratid history down to about 1030 (for the date of the text: Toumanoff 1943: 154–6; Sumbat Davit'is-dze, ed. Araxamia 1990: 10–32). It is particularly rich for the eleventh century. The second work, *The Chronicle of K'art'li*, was composed by an anonymous author in the 1070s. This text covers much of the same ground as Davit'is-dze's, though it furnishes unparalleled information about the monarchies of Kaxet'i in the east and Ap'xazet'i in the west. *The Chronicle* contains the single reference to Mary in medieval Georgian historiography. Significantly, both texts are devoid of the Persian framework of pre-Bagratid historical literature. Instead, both exhibit an intimate familiarity with the Byzantine commonwealth and set Georgia's experiences within it.

These two early Bagratid histories are similar to their pre-Bagratid counterparts insofar as they assign women an exceedingly limited role: more often than not, such women are just pawns in the game of diplomacy. However, we occasionally catch a glimpse of a strong female character, and this might very well have been known to Mary. In particular, three women may have inspired her. Although we learn dreadfully little about Guaranduxt, she emerges as a most interesting figure, the daughter of Giorgi II of Ap'xazet'i in western Georgia and the mother of Bagrat III (d. 1014), the king who first created a unified Georgian realm by integrating lands immediately to the east and west of the Surami mountains. Indeed, Bagrat's project to unify the Georgian lands owed much to his fortunate pedigree, his mother's lineage giving him a special connection to western Georgia. Although Guaranduxt is not mentioned in Davit'is-dze's work, the anonymous *Chronicle of K'art'li* underscores her position by reporting that, for

¹⁴ The first woman to rule in her own right, T'amar, ascended the throne only in the late twelfth century. T'amar's gender posed certain problems to the establishment. She was persuaded to marry so that her husband could supervise the army. Her first marriage, to Iurii Bogoliubskii from Rus', was disastrous and ended in an annulment. It is widely held that Shota Rustaveli's famous epic *Vep'xistqaosani* (*Knight in the Panther's Skin*) was written in her honour and allegorically describes the events of her reign (Nat'adze & C'aishvili 1966). In the poem, the mythical 'king of the Arabs' Rostevan entrusted the kingdom to his daughter T'inat'in, thus mirroring T'amar's accession under her father Giorgi III (r. 1156–1184). T'amar – and then her daughter Queen Rusudan (r. 1223–1245) – could not, of course, have served as models of behaviour for the earlier Mary 'of Alania'. Conversely, we possess no evidence of Mary having influenced T'amar or Rusudan, though more research on this intriguing possibility is sorely needed.

a time, she administered the pivotal fortress-city of Up'lis-c'ixc and also part of K'art'li (*Chronicle of K'art'li* 274–6). However, once her son arrived in person, he took possession of those places. Guaranduxt makes several appearances, and her activities clearly show that a Bagratid woman could exercise an active role in the administration of the realm.

Before he became king of a united Georgian enterprise, Bagrat IV had been held hostage in Constantinople, a situation not unfamiliar to other Georgian princes. When his father, Giorgi I, died in 1027, Bagrat was a young boy. It is possible that a regent ruled in his name, and in accordance with Georgian tradition we must wonder whether his mother, Mariam, served in that capacity. Davit'is-dze (para. 70) refers to Mariam's prominence, noting that in 1030,

... the dearest queen Mariam was filled with boldness and courage, for she was descended from the resplendently strong and great Arshakuniani [ie, Arsacid] kings [and] she went to Constantinople [and] appeared before King Romanos [III Argyros, r. 1028–1034] with supplication, and so that he would grant peace to the East, so that battles between the Greeks and K'art'velians would cease, and so that the poor might calm down, and so that they would bestow her son, King Bagrat, the honor according to the dignity of [his] name. (Araxamia ed., 59–60; Qauxch'ishvili ed., 386)

In its essentials, Mariam's embassy replicates that of Sagduxt. Mariam's undertaking was of such great importance that the anonymous author of the *Chronicle of K'art'li* also recorded it:

... Queen Mariam, mother of Bagrat king of the Ap'xaz, went to Greece in order to seek peace and an alliance, and also to seek the title of *curopalates* for her son – as is the custom and right of their house – and also to bring back a wife for her son. When she reached Greece and met the king of the Greeks, he joyfully fulfilled all her requests. He gave oaths and assurances of alliance and friendship, wrote chrysobulls, bestowed the title of *curopalates*, and gave the princess Elene [Helena] as a wife for Bagrat. (*Chronicle of K'art'li* 294; Thomson 1996: 287–8)

This was clearly a monumental undertaking, a mission with numerous goals, especially in light of the warfare that had been waged between the Byzantines and the Georgians in the preceding years, and a suitable model for Mary. The role of Mariam in arranging a marriage between her son Bagrat and the Byzantine princess Helena (Elene Argyropoulaina) represents a long-standing tradition of diplomatic marriages at the Georgian court. Even in the pre-Bagratid period, it had been customary for the K'art'velian kings to wed foreign princesses – ideally from royal houses – and to reciprocate by sending their daughters and even sisters to be the wives of non-Georgian monarchs. By Mary's time, this institution had existed for centuries.

Mariam was the daughter of Senek'erim of Armenia: the *Chronicle of K'art'li* speaks of the Armenians being her subjects because of her parentage. She also played a prominent part at Bagrat's deathbed ('Mother, I pity you, because all your children have gone before you, and thus you will die'), and disagreement between Bagrat and Mariam is recorded regarding the future of Bagrat's half-brother Demetre, who defected to Byzantium in 1033 handing over the fortress of Anakop'ia (*Chronicle of K'art'li*, Qauxch'ishvili 1955: 295, 298–9, 314). It may even be the case that Mariam's own checkered marital history influenced Mary in the belief that canon law did not necessarily apply to members of royal families: Mariam was divorced or sidelined by Giorgi I so that he could marry Alda, daughter of the king of Alania, the legality of which seems not to have been questioned. Mariam returned to prominence on her son's accession, and, as queen-mother, spent three years with Bagrat in residence at Constantinople during the reign of Constantine Monomachos in the 1050s (see above). During Bagrat's later enforced exile at the Byzantine court another woman of his family, his sister Guaranduxt, was 'protector' (patroni) of his young son Giorgi II. It was she who demanded that Constantine Monomachos return Bagrat, and he 'sent him back in great glory with gifts and incalculable treasure' (*Chronicle of K'art'li*, Qauxch'ishvili 1955: 304).

Bagratid women were also distinguished by their contributions to the church and monastic foundations: Mariam in particular was noted for her donations to monasteries. As well as her association with Giorgi Mt'acmideli following her residence in Constantinople in the 1050s, she was commemorated for donations to the Iviron monastery in its *Synodikon* (Lefort et al 1990: 8). Furthermore, according to the *Life of Giorgi Mt'acmideli*, after Mary's marriage Queen Mariam went to the city of Antioch, intending to continue to Jerusalem to worship at the holy places, carrying with her a royal order for the governor and patriarch of Antioch: these however decided, on the advice of Giorgi, that it would be better for her not to visit Jerusalem under Saracen rule. Giorgi himself took her money and distributed it among the poor and the monasteries there (Thomson 1996: 378, for the text as inserted into a later redaction of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*).

Perhaps the most obvious female influence upon Mary is her mother. As we have already seen, Borena was a native of Ovset'i (i.e., Alania), and it was partly because of this circumstance that her daughter became known to Byzantines as Mary 'of Alania.' The medieval Georgian historical tradition divulges exceedingly little information about Borena. In the eleventh-century *Chronicle of K'art'li*, we read that 'After a little time Queen Helena passed away in K'ut'at'isi [the royal city of western Georgia], and King Bagrat married Queen Borena, daughter of the king of the Ovsis, sister of [King] Dorgholeli' (*Chronicle of K'art'li* 295; Thomson 1996: 288). So, like her

daughter, Borena was a princess resident at a foreign court. We know that Borena had some contact with her homeland. For example, when her brother Dorgholeli made an appearance at Bagrat's court he arranged an audience with Borena. The last we hear about Borena is her presence at the death of her spouse, Bagrat IV. These two episodes are related one after the other (*Chronicle of K'art'li* 313–14).

We do know that Borena was literate and that she was a writer; this certainly helps explain Mary's sponsorship of Byzantine authors and copyists. A five-line poem, 'A Prayer for the Mother of God', has traditionally been ascribed to Borena's hand (Kekelidze 1969: 172; Lolashvili 1978: 494):

Oh you, who paid homage to Eve
 When you declared to Gabriel: 'I am the bride of the Lord'.
 Then you gave the lodging to the otherworldly,
 (And) perished the force who first shed blood.
 Oh, Virgin, deliver me, Borena of the many sorrows.¹⁵

Should this poem actually have been composed by Borena, then it is a testament to her acculturation: after all, Ovsî, and not some dialect of Georgian, must have been her native language. It should be noted, however, that the K'art'velian idiom of Georgian was the only written language in this part of Caucasia – so it is to be expected that such a written work would be composed in Georgian. Mary may not have actually composed works in Greek in her own hand, but she certainly encouraged others to do so through her patronage and in terms of both her piety and her need and ability to acculturate within a new environment she had much in common with her mother.

Mary's Influence within Byzantium

Mary may well have started a new trend of Georgian marriages in Byzantium. Clearly Theodore Gabras and Constantine the grand droungarios felt it appropriate to link themselves with the empress and choose Georgian women, her relatives and attendants, for their second wives. Within the imperial family, alliances with Bagratid Georgia continued to be perceived as important: Anna Komnene's two sons married Georgian princesses – the elder, Alexios Bryennios Komnenos, apparently married Kata, daughter of Davit' II (r. 1089–1125), in 1116 (Zonaras 3.761; *Life of Davit' II*, ed. Shanidze 180; ed. Qauxch'ishvili 334). But Kata might have been married to another Alexios, the eldest son of John II Komnenos after the death of his first wife Dobrodeja (Gautier 1970: 209). Toumanoff (1940) has also

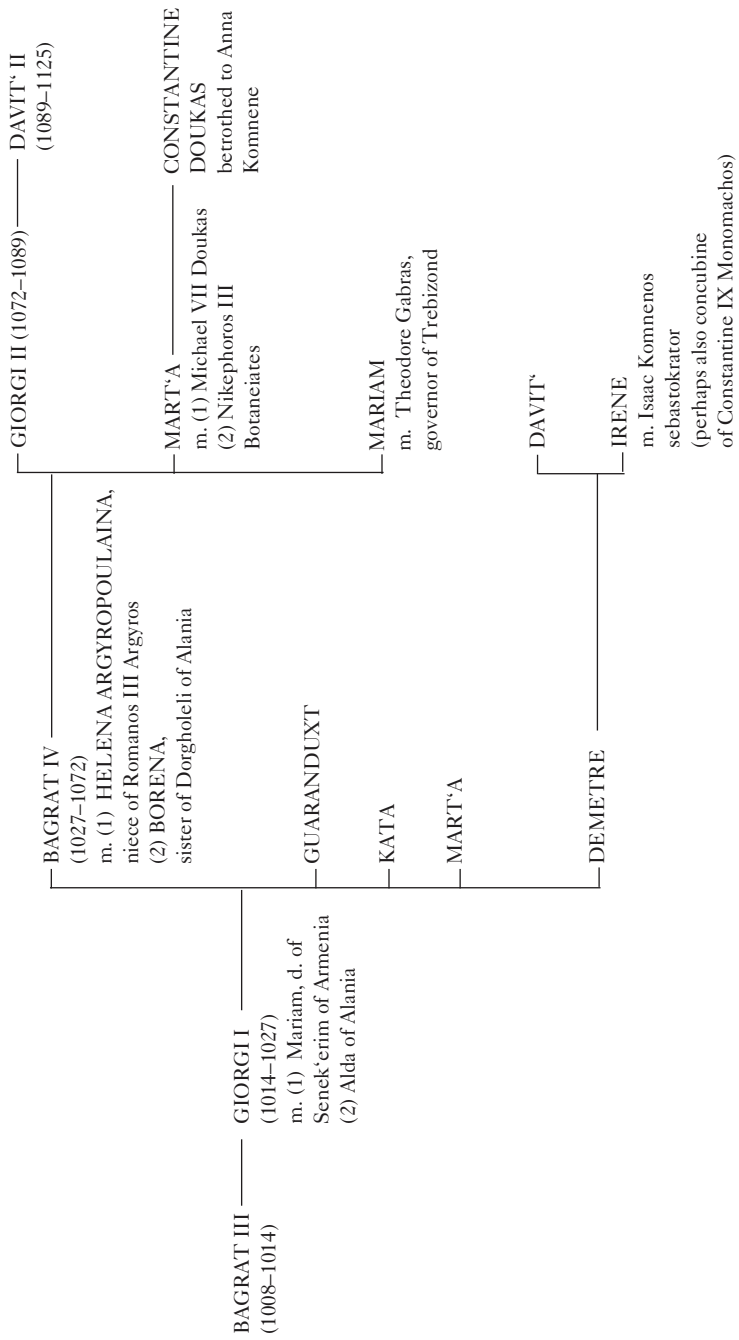
¹⁵ We are indebted to Professor Dodona Kiziria of Indiana University who kindly translated this passage.

suggested that Andronikos Komnenos (r. 1183–85) may have married c.1145 a Georgian princess, sister of Giorgi III (father of T‘amar), as his (otherwise unknown) first wife, which gave rise to extensive intermarrying between the Great Komnenoi of Trebizond and the Georgian Bagratids.

Mary arguably played a pivotal role in political intrigues of the late eleventh century. The seminal question is the extent to which Mary was influenced by her predecessors and contemporaries in Byzantium, such as Eudokia Makrembolitissa and the power-broking skills of women such as Anna Dalassene and Maria of Bulgaria, mother of Irene Doukaina – or whether she was drawing on her Georgian heritage in her ability to manipulate events and acquire a network of supporters and adherents. How was it that this young foreign princess without contacts in Byzantium was to become one of the really influential figures of the late eleventh century?

Certainly, despite her isolation and foreign background, or perhaps because of it, she had no compunction in interfering in Byzantine politics, like her mother-in-law Eudokia Makrembolitissa. Nevertheless, in her willingness to enter into the masculine spheres of power politics, even when this involved the flouting of canon law on remarriage (just as in her interest in literary patronage and intellectual enquiry), it is arguable that Mary was drawing on her Georgian ancestry, where a number of influential women, not least her grandmother, can be seen to have played a significant role. Georgian sources not only elucidate the details of Mary’s background and career as empress of Byzantium but also the ways in which she helped to set the scene for the political, social and economic influence of Komnenian women in the twelfth century.

The Bagratids of Georgia





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Middle Byzantine Family Values and Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*

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Anna Komnene was born on 2 December 1083, the eldest child and first daughter of Alexios I Komnenos and Irene Doukaina. Most significantly, and a fact the reader of *The Alexiad* is never allowed to forget, Anna was born in the porphyra chamber of the imperial palace and her birth was associated with a miraculous happening.¹ This self-conception as the eldest born of the Komnenoi-Doukai *porphyrogennetoï* was an expression of her goal in life: to ascend the imperial throne as empress-regnant.² This goal was thwarted by the men in her life: her first fiancé Constantine Doukas (though his failure was one of omission – failing to remain alive – rather than of commission); her husband Nikephoros Bryennios, who declined to join in her plots against her brother; her father Alexios, who ignored her plotting to replace her brother John and to become Alexios's heir; and of course her detested younger brother, John II Komnenos, who did succeed Alexios in 1118.

At an early age, Anna Komnene was betrothed to Constantine Doukas, the son of Michael VII Doukas and Maria the Alan and Anna was brought up in the household of her future mother-in-law.³ This short summation, however, conceals the deeper ramifications of the home-life of Anna Komnene. Anna Komnene's fiancé, the kaisar (Caesar) Constantine Doukas was, on Anna Komnene's maternal side, her second cousin once removed. On her father's side, Anna Komnene's paternal uncle's wife (i.e. Irene of Alania, married to Isaakios Komnenos, Alexios I Komnenos's brother) was a first-degree cousin of Maria of Alania, Constantine Doukas' mother. The situation was further compounded by the rumour that in 1081 at the time of

¹ *Alexiad* VI viii 2, ed. & tr. Bernard Leib, *Anne Comnène, Alexiade* (Budé, Paris: 1937–45) 2:61,4–17, tr. E. R. A. Sewter, *The Alexiad of Anna Komnena* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth: 1969), 196.

² Hunger, *Hochsprachliche Literatur*, 401.

³ *Alexiad* III i 4; Leib 1:105,4–6; Sewter, 105; see Garland and Rapp in this volume.

the Komnenian revolt against Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078–81), Alexios I Komnenos, having been adopted by Maria of Alania as her son in an effort to protect the rights of her birth-child Constantine from her previous marriage to Michael VII Doukas (1071–78), was considering repudiating his marriage to Irene Doukaina and marrying Maria of Alania instead.⁴ In a situation most scriptwriters (Hollywood or Bollywood) would deem unbelievable, Alexios then betrothed his eldest daughter to the son of his adoptive mother, a woman who additionally he had contemplated making his wife. Anna's future became less bright in 1087 with the birth of her brother John. In 1092 she lost her priority in the succession to John. Constantine Doukas died sometime after 1094, when he is mentioned for the last time in the sources.

By 1097 at the latest, Anna Komnene was married to Nikephoros Bryennios, the grandson of the Bryennios captured by the youthful Alexios and blinded on the orders of Nikephoros Botaneiates.⁵ The marriage may have been prompted by a desire to tie the Bryennios family more closely to the ruling Komnenoi, as it seems to have originated from *Realpolitik* rather than from Anna's own desires. The marriage produced two sons (Alexios Komnenos and John Doukas) and two daughters (Irene and Maria) though they receive no mention in *The Alexiad*, and it seems to have lasted happily until Nikephoros Bryennios's death in 1136 or 1137. His mother-in-law liked Nikephoros Bryennios. With her daughter Anna Komnene, Irene Doukaina attempted to replace John Komnenos with Bryennios and Anna in the succession when Alexios I Komnenos died in 1118. These plots came to nothing and after her husband's death Anna retired to the monastery of Kecharitomene, founded by her mother.⁶ There she began work on completing the life of her father begun by her husband at the request of her mother. Anna died in about 1153–54.

These are the prosopographical 'bones' of Anna Komnene's life. The particular focus of Anna's life-experience in this paper is how she related to her father and family. Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*, the source through which we read her voice most clearly, is regarded as strange kind of history. Charles Diehl's view – that *The Alexiad* is less the title of a history book than the title

⁴ *Alexiad* III ii 1; Leib 1:106,4–7; Sewter, 105. This was the cause of George Palaiologos's impassioned speech to the fleet during the coup of 1081, and the fleet's joint acclamations of Alexios and Irene: *Alexiad* III ii 1; Leib 1:106,11–18; Sewter, 106.

⁵ Suzanne Wittek-De Jongh, 'Le César Nicéphore Bryennios, l'historien, et ses ascendants', *Byzantion* 23 (1953), 463–468.

⁶ Perhaps after 1138, Rac Dalven, *Anna Comnena* (New York, 1972), 66; Paul Gautier, 'L'obituaire du typikon du Pantocrator', *REB* 27 (1969), 235–62.

of an epic poem, written to celebrate a legendary hero⁷ – is supported by many readings of the text. Anna Komnene continually claims that she loves truth more than she loves her father, but one leaves the book feeling it is the bluestocking production of an infatuated eldest daughter, almost the archetype of ‘Daddy’s princess’. The genesis of this paper lies rooted in the incident reported by Niketas Choniates in his *Narrative*. Dealing with the transfer of power from the dying Alexios I Komnenos to his son John II Komnenos in 1118, Choniates portrays Anna Komnene as a shrew. Faced with a weak husband who had refused to act to seize the empire on his own behalf, she made him suffer:

When having conjugal relations, Anna Komnene tensed her muscles when Nikephoros Bryennios inserted his penis, causing him great pain.⁸

The standard diagnostic reference manual suggests that this, the clinical presentation of *vaginismus* in later life, may be indicative of a history of sexual abuse or trauma, or at least that the possibility of this aetiology should be explored by the clinician.⁹ *DSM-IV* refers to the literature in which the case histories of 22 women who presented with *vaginismus* are correlated. The women all had domineering, threatening fathers who were moralistic but also sexually seductive; the parents of the subjects had high levels of verbal conflict and verbal and/or physical abuse in their marriages; most of the subjects either witnessed or experienced actual physical violation in their histories; subjects with *vaginismus* were the ‘good girls’ of their families and could not express anger; the subjects seemed to choose partners who seem kind, gentle and often passive.¹⁰ Compare this with what is known about Anna Komnene. Anna Komnene describes her father as terrifying both to his daughters and to his wife during the episode of the reprieve of the Anemas rebels.¹¹ On the other hand, she describes him in glowing physical terms.¹²

⁷ Charles Diehl, *La société byzantine à l'époque des Comnènes* (Paris, 1929), 8. See more recently, P. Magdalino and R. Nelson, ‘The Emperor in Byzantine Art of the Twelfth Century’, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 8 (1982), 129.

⁸ Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. Johannes A. van Dieten (de Gruyter, Berlin and New York: 1975), 10, 52–56.

⁹ I am grateful to R. J. W. Phillips, MA, MRCP, Department of General Practice, GTK School of Medicine, King’s College London for the information that *vaginismus* in later life may be indicative of a history of sexual abuse or trauma. He is not responsible for the use I have made of the information! See *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)* 4th edition, (American Psychiatric Association, Washington DC: 1994), 513–14.

¹⁰ Judith L. Silverstein, ‘Origins of Psychogenic Vaginismus’, *Psychotherapies and Psychosomatics* 54 (4) 1989, 179–204. See also Derek Jchu and Marjorie Gazan, ‘Psychosocial Adjustment of women who were sexually victimized in childhood or adolescence’, *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health* 2:2 (1983), 71–82 and David Finkelhor, *Sexually Victimized Children* (The Free Press, New York NY: 1979), especially 25–27.

¹¹ *Alexiad* XII vi 7; Leib 3:76 6; Sewter, 385.

After the depravity of the Great Palace under Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055), Anna Dalassene gave it a high moral tone;¹³ while Irene Doukaina read Maximos Confessor at the lunch table.¹⁴ Alexios submitted to the Patriarch Kosmas after seizing the throne and did penance for the sack of the capital.¹⁵ At the time of the rebellion in 1081, there were rumours that Alexios would set Irene Doukaina aside in favour of Maria of Alania; in the later part of his reign, even though it was regarded as unseemly Alexios took Irene on campaign with him – not perhaps so much because of her efficacy in relieving his gout, but because she was too dangerous to leave behind in the capital.¹⁶ Anna Komnene writes *The Alexiad* as the dutiful daughter of her father and mother, whose marriage ‘according to law’ (like her own) is stressed.¹⁷ Whilst intriguing, these parallels cannot be followed in any real historical sense. The re-examination of the Freudian cases of ‘Dora’ and Emma Eckstein shows that even with the patient on the couch, not all may be what it seems, leaving to one side all the literature on recovered memory syndrome.¹⁸ But in *The Alexiad*, we have a major source that allows us to look at how one Byzantine saw her family.

Alexander Kazhdan has identified the family as ‘the one form of association that flourished in Byzantium’.¹⁹ He contrasted ‘the cult of the closed nuclear family’²⁰ that flourished in Byzantium and what he saw as the distinctive characteristic of Byzantine society, ‘the weakness of social ties

¹² *Alexiad* II i 4; Leib 1:64,22; Sewter, 74 and *Alexiad* III iii 2; Leib 1:110,26–111,17; Sewter, 109–10.

¹³ *Alexiad* III viii 2–3; Leib 1:125,19–126,16; Sewter, 120–21.

¹⁴ *Alexiad* V ix 3; Leib 2:38,2–6; Sewter, 178–79.

¹⁵ *Alexiad* III v 1–6; Leib 1:116,18–119,12; Sewter, 113–15.

¹⁶ *Alexiad* XIII i 4; Leib 3:88,15–17 and 3:89,3–18; Sewter, 397.

¹⁷ Κατὰ νόμους *Alexiad* II vii 7; Leib 1:87,17; Sewter, 91 for Alexios and Irene; *Alexiad* Prooimion iii 1; Leib 1:5,8; Sewter, 18 for Anna and Nikephoros Bryennios. These are two mentions out of 26 uses of the word ‘law’ in the *Alexiad* (laws of God, laws of the church, law of history) so it is unwise to attempt to construct too heavy an edifice on them. It should be noted that when Alexios moved to the Great Palace after the coup, he resided in the Boukoleon, whilst Irene (aged only 15) remained in the lower palace with her sisters, her mother and her paternal grandfather, the kaisar John Doukas; *Alexiad* III i 5; Leib 1:105,20–24; Sewter, 105.

¹⁸ Anthony Stevens, *An Intelligent Person’s Guide to Psychotherapy* (Duckworth, London: 1998), esp. 31–32; R.T. Lakoff and J.C. Coyne, *Father Knows Best: The Use and abuse of Power in Freud’s Case of ‘Dora’* (Teachers’ College Press, New York: 1993); Richard Webster, *Why Freud was wrong: Sin, Science and Psychoanalysis* (HarperCollins, London: 1997); Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth: Freud and Child Sexual Abuse* (Fontana/Collins, London: 1992). On the recovered memory syndrome, see especially the 2000 appendix to Judith Lewis Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA & London: 2000).

¹⁹ Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies*, (Washington, DC., 1982), 32–33; see also A. Kazhdan, ‘Small Social Groupings (Microstructures) in Byzantine Society’, *JÖB* 32.2 (1982), 3–11; Ruth J. Macrides, ‘Kinship by Arrangement: The Case of Adoption’, *DOP* 44 (1990), 109.

²⁰ Kazhdan, *People and Power*; 50 & 124.

above the level of the family.²¹ 'The family' has had a very mixed history. The nuclear family has been described as a modern product of the industrial revolution, replacing the extended family of co-residential kin with the conjugal couple united by affection with their offspring, shielded and protected by bourgeois privacy from society and the power of the state.²² But looking at Byzantium, the evidence supports the universality of the nuclear family; it confirms Demos' research on early modern New England and the work of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and the Social Structure (for all that the latter has been criticised for failing to take account of diachronic change in family structure), which shows that the conjugal couple with children is and has been the dominant family structure in the majority of societies.²³ The upper levels of society, where households include servants (or in Byzantium, slaves), are deviations from the norm of the dominance of the nuclear family, not its nemesis.

Philippe Ariès has suggested that family history should be concerned with the emotional qualities of family relations,²⁴ a direction which seems to be urged by Ruth Macrides, when she wrote: 'we need to know more ... about solidarities within families, about relations between parents and children'.²⁵ This connects neatly with Mark Poster's view that 'family history' should move away from issues of family size and should concentrate instead on emotional patterns.²⁶ Research on 'families' should ask whether they are places of nurturing, toleration or repression. The family is the ultimate and only consistently subversive organisation; only the family has continued through history and still continues to undermine the state.²⁷ In that sense it is a great locus of power – perhaps indeed of the primal power struggle as Freud saw it. In any case the Byzantine family was where the power relationships between family members were worked out. *The Alexiad* records one perception of the relationship between a Byzantine father and his daughter.

²¹ Kazhdan, *People and Power*, 26. In this connection, it is interesting to note the comment: 'We discussed earlier the theory that incest tends to occur among isolated families and in isolated subcultures. Some theorists have alleged that isolation is, in fact, the dominant feature of our society. The isolation encompasses not just families but also individuals and results from increased mobility and the disintegration of neighborhoods [sic], communities and kin networks.' Finkelhor, *Sexually Victimized Children*, 30.

²² Michael Wasey, *Strangers and Friends: a new exploration of homosexuality and the Bible* (Hodder and Stoughton, London: 1995), 32.

²³ John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1971).

²⁴ Mark Poster, *Critical Theory of the Family* (London, 1978), x–xiii.

²⁵ Macrides, 'Kinship by Arrangement', 109.

²⁶ Poster, *Critical Theory of the Family*, xvii.

²⁷ Ferdinand Mount, *The Subversive Family: An Alternative History of Love and Marriage* (London, 1982), 1.

Anna Komnene and her father

From the very opening of the work, we are made aware of Anna's relationship with her father. Her self-presentation as 'daughter of the Emperor Alexios and the Empress Irene, born and bred in the Purple'²⁸ and only then identified as 'not without some acquaintance with literature'²⁹ makes this clear. In the *prooimion* to the work, she sets out her intention 'by means of my writings to give an account of my father's deeds, which do not deserve to be consigned to Forgetfulness nor to be swept away on the flood of Time into an ocean of Non-Remembrance'.³⁰ She is aware that she may be held guilty of self-glorification in composing the history of her father, that when she praises him she will be accused of writing panegyric and that if she criticizes Alexios, she will have the story of Ham cast upon her.³¹ Her protests that she presents an accurate account of her father's reign continue through the work. At the end of Book I she writes:

... if I should discover some action of his not commendable, I will not spare him because he is my father, nor shall I course lightly over his triumphs because of an under-current of suspicion that a daughter, writing of her father, may be biased.³²

Similarly at the end of Book IV, after an extended account of personal military valour on the part of Alexios in battle against Robert Guiscard – which with its detail and lively narrative James Howard-Johnston would probably identify as part of the 'Bryennian *Alexiad*'³³ – Anna Komnene protests her integrity as an impartial reporter of events in the past. She had forgotten it was her father about whom she was writing; her awareness of the family connection meant that she spares the reader too many details of greater heroics; she avoids rhetoric to describe her father's woes.³⁴

The suspicion that she could be guilty of embroidering the truth to enhance the reputation of her mother as much as that of her father is another of Anna's fears: 'There is much that I could say about her, if it were not that

²⁸ *Alexiad* Prooimion; Leib 1:3,11–12; Sewter, 17.

²⁹ *Alexiad* Prooimion; Leib 1:3,12; Sewter, 17.

³⁰ *Alexiad* Prooimion; Leib 1:3,19–4,3; Sewter, 17.

³¹ *Alexiad* Prooimion; Leib 1:4,219–25; Sewter, 18. The use of the story of Ham (Genesis 9:18–27), when Ham saw his father's nakedness (and therefore his son Canaan was relegated to be the progenitor of a subject people) hints at sexual abuse [that Anna had seen her father's nakedness], but this is probably over-interpretation.

³² *Alexiad* I xvi 9; Leib 1:60,26–61,12; Sewter, 72.

³³ James Howard-Johnston, 'Anna Komnene and the *Alexiad*', *Alexios I Komnenos I: Papers*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Dion Smythe (Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations, Belfast: 1996), 260–302. Howard-Johnston's idea that detailed and lively battle narratives cannot have been written by a woman and must therefore derive from lost Bryennios dossiers rather than having been written by Anna Komnene has fortunately not found many adherents.

³⁴ *Alexiad* IV viii 1; Leib 1:166,6–30; Sewter, 151–52.

being her daughter I might be suspected of lying to gratify a mother.’³⁵ But the real force of this argument remains with her dealings with Alexios. Presenting the emperor in a somewhat negative light as the unprepared target of the Keltic spear, the Ishmaelite bow and the Skythian wagons, nevertheless Anna protests her innocence of partiality and indeed her unnatural stance as historian rather than as daughter. She says she transgresses nature (as a daughter) to tell the truth (as a historian), ‘I regard him as dear, but truth as dearer still’; neither adding nor subtracting, the proof of her accurate witnessing being that others remain alive from that time who experienced the events directly.³⁶ Again in Book XV, the last in the work, after dealing with a battle narrative before Nikomedia, Anna returns once more to the self-justification of her treatment of Alexios in the history:

At this point I must again beg the reader not to rebuke me for being boastful; this is by no means the first time I have defended myself against such an accusation. It is not love for my father which prompts me to these reflections, but the course of events. In any case, there is nothing (as far as truth is concerned) to prevent a person loving his or her father and at the same time respecting veracity.³⁷

These long expositions of Anna’s relationship to her father and the truth do not prove to be that reassuring. The nature of the structure of the narrative and her role in composing the text – even setting to one side the Howard-Johnston thesis – leaves too many unresolved problems with the text as a whole. Nevertheless, there are details and aspects of family life that appear to be vital and revealing in the text.

Women and Family Life

The set-piece remorse over the sack of Constantinople is presented by Anna, not as merely the penance of the men-folk but as a collective act of repentance. Though Anna is careful to place the blame for the sack of Constantinople (which to add to the horror took place of on Maundy Thursday, 1 April 1081) on the common soldiers and not on any policy decision of Alexios, yet she describes Alexios as a sensitive soul, deeply distressed by the capture of the city and the associated bloodshed. The good boy that he was, Alexios sought the advice of his mother and with her agreement went to the Patriarch Kosmas and the Resident Synod. Penance was deemed due from Alexios and his blood-relations, but was paid also by their wives:

³⁵ *Alexiad* XII iii 10; Leib 3:64,5–7; Sewter, 378.

³⁶ *Alexiad* XIV vii 3–4; Leib 3:173,21–174,13; Sewter, 459.

³⁷ *Alexiad* XV iii 4; Leib 3:196,16–197,5; Sewter, 478.

in fact, their wives could not bear to stand aloof (how could they when they loved their husbands?) and of their own free-will they too submitted to the yoke of penance. The palace became a scene of tearful lamentation.³⁸

Given the complex role of the women of Alexios' connection in the revolt – indeed almost their leading role given the rather wimpish behaviour of Alexios and Isaakios – it is perhaps only fitting that they should have participated in the penance for Christian bloodshed. The domestic details revealed about the household of Anna Dalassene as she removed herself and her family from the house to go to the sanctuary of Hagia Sophia when the coup became overt – Nikephoros Botaniates' grandson asleep in the house with his tutor in an apartment separated by double doors, the tutor running after the household when he realised that something was afoot, and the ease with which Anna Dalassene was able to deflect him to the Great Palace itself whilst she took refuge in the chapel of St Nicholas – must be similar to the situation of the young Anna Komnene, raised by Maria of Alania, mother of the kaisar Constantine Doukas.³⁹

With the institution of the new regime and most especially with the appointment of Anna Dalassene to vice-regal powers, the home-life of the palace underwent a dramatic transformation.

The women's quarters in the palace had been the scene of utter depravity ever since the infamous Constantine Monomachos has ascended the throne and right up to the time when my father became emperor had been noted for foolish love intrigues, but Anna [Dalassene] effected a reformation; a commendable decorum was restored and the palace now enjoyed a discipline there merited praise. She instituted set times of the singing of sacred hymns, stated hours for meals; there was now a special period in which magistrates were chosen. She herself set a firm example to everybody else, with the result that the palace assumed the appearance rather of a monastery...⁴⁰

Penniless relatives found refuge in her house, as did strangers, and monks and priests were her usual guests at table. Coupled with her devotion to the governance of the empire, Anna Dalassene spent most of the night chanting hymns and 'wore herself out with continual prayers and vigils.'⁴¹ The religious impulse in the Imperial Palace was something that Irene Doukaina continued – at least according to the descriptions of her daughter. Anna describes the meal-times of the imperial family, when her mother read Maximos Confessor at table. Anna Komnene recounts how she questioned her mother about her ability to read such works and how Irene explained

³⁸ *Alexiad* III v 5; Leib 1:118,29–119,3; Sewter, 115.

³⁹ *Alexiad* II v 1–4; Leib 1:75,17–76,27; Sewter, 83–4; *Alexiad* III I 4; Leib 1:105,4–6; Sewter, 105 for Anna being raised by Maria of Alania.

⁴⁰ *Alexiad* III viii 2; Leib 1:125,19–31; Sewter, 121.

⁴¹ *Alexiad* III viii 4; Leib 1:126,23–25; Sewter, 121.

that ‘after a close look at other books, believe me, you will taste the sweetness of these.’⁴² The tale of her discussion with Irene is matched by the story of Alexios sometimes telling of his adventures to his family, giving in to their strong pressure to tell ‘what Daddy did during the war’ to his own circle.⁴³ The narrative of Anna’s own birth, and how she resembled her father in all respects, is the miraculous event that singles her out, even before her birth as the devoted child of both her parents. ‘On several occasions I have heard my mother tell how, two days before the emperor’s return to the palace (he was coming back then after his battle with Robert and his other numerous wars and labours) she was seized with the pains of childbirth and making the sign of the Cross over her womb, said, “Wait a while, little one till your father’s arrival.” Her mother the *protovestiaria*, so she said, reproached her soundly: “What if he comes in a month’s time? Do you know when he’ll arrive?” she said angrily. “And how will you bear such pain?”’⁴⁴

One of the major set pieces of the family life of Anna Komnene and her parents recorded in *The Alexiad* is when Anna interceded with her mother to plead with her father for the sight of Anemas, who having been found guilty of plotting rebellion was being ritually humiliated and was then to be blinded. The kindness of Irene Doukaina is already established in the text by the fact that though she was awarded the house of the John Solomon, one of the ringleaders of the revolt, nevertheless out of pity for Solomon’s wife, Irene Doukaina took nothing from the house but returned it intact to her.⁴⁵ Then the account moves on to Anemas:

Anemas and the other prominent rebels, after having their heads completely shaved and their beards cut, were paraded on the emperor’s orders through the Agora. Then their eyes were to be gouged. The persons in charge of the show laid hands on them, clothed them in sackcloth, decorated their heads with ox and sheep entrails (to imitate crowns), put them on oxen (not astride the beasts but riding sideways) and drove them through the palace court. In front of them rod-bearers charged, bawling a comic ditty with alternate refrains suited to the occasion.⁴⁶

The princesses, too, came to see the show, but were moved to pity for the way in which Anemas was being treated and the fate he was to suffer. Anna called on her mother to plead with her father, calling Irene away from her father’s side at prayer for the very purpose. ‘I went down and stood terrified outside the doors. I had not the courage to go in, but called her by signs’.⁴⁷

⁴² *Alexiad* V ix 3; Leib 2:38,2–6; Sewter, 178–79.

⁴³ *Alexiad* VII iii 11; Leib 2:101,5–11; Sewter, 226.

⁴⁴ *Alexiad* VI viii 2; Leib 2:61,10–14; Sewter, 196.

⁴⁵ *Alexiad* XII vi 4; Leib 3:72,26–30; Sewter, 384.

⁴⁶ *Alexiad* XII vi 5; Leib 3:73,1–11; Sewter, 384–85.

⁴⁷ *Alexiad* XII vi 7; Leib 3:74,5–7; Sewter, 385.

Yet for all the terror and fear of disturbing her father at prayer, it seems that the organisers of the march had set a leisurely pace to ensure that reprieve would arrive in time from the emperor at the appropriate time, before the brazen hands – as indeed it did.⁴⁸ Though appearing to be a loving couple in Anna Komnene's account – Anna maintains that it was because of her role as ever-vigilant guardian that Alexios brought her with him on campaign late in his reign – it may actually have been because it was better to have Irene under his close supervision rather than on the loose in Constantinople.⁴⁹ Nevertheless it may have been a more fraught relationship than Anna wishes to suggest, especially as Irene sought to replace her son John II in the succession with her daughter and her husband Nikephoros Bryennios.

Anna Komnene and other family members

In her *prooimion*, Anna Komnene engages in lavish praise of her husband Nikephoros Bryennios and this has been taken in part as an indication that much of the preliminary work of compilation and gathering was done by Nikephoros with Anna taking over as the guiding hand when her husband died. Anna is careful to describe herself as the 'lawful wife of the Kaisar Nikephoros' and this appears to have had a deeper significance for her than one might imagine. However, it remains overwhelmed by the lamentations that the memories of her husband provoke.⁵⁰ The very positive description of the older Bryennios, Anna's grandfather-in-law, when he opposed the young Alexios, is difficult to disentangle from the need to present him as a worthy opponent: the defeat of an insignificant opponent is no victory at all.⁵¹ Similar delicacy surrounds Anna Komnene's description of the supporters of John Italos, who generally speaking gets short shrift in *The Alexiad*, because his patrons were Doukai, and therefore Anna's own maternal relations.⁵²

At one of the first mentions of Constantine Doukas, her fiancé, Anna Komnene is very positive: 'About Constantine, the terms of his marriage contract [here to the daughter of the Norman Robert Guiscard] and the foreign alliance in general, his handsome appearance and stature, his physical and moral qualities, we shall speak in due course, when I relate the sorry tale of my own misfortunes.'⁵³ When describing Constantine Doukas aged a little under seven at the time of the Komnenian coup, and the reasons for Maria of

⁴⁸ *Alexiad* XII vi 8; Leib 3:74,11–14; Sewter, 385.

⁴⁹ *Alexiad* XII iii 2–8; Leib 3:60,3–63,8; Sewter, 374–377.

⁵⁰ For the legality of her marriage, see *Alexiad* Prooimion iii 1; Leib 1:5,7–8; Sewter, 18. For the lamentation over Nikephoros Bryennios's death, see *Alexiad* Prooimion iv 1; Leib 1:6,31–38,3; Sewter, 20–21.

⁵¹ *Alexiad* I v 1; Leib 1:19,15–20; Sewter, 39.

⁵² *Alexiad* V viii 4; Leib 2:34,23–28; Sewter, 175.

⁵³ *Alexiad* I x 2; Leib 1:37,18–28; Sewter, 53.

Alania remaining in the palace, Anna uses standard rhetorical terms.⁵⁴ She connects her birth with her association with Constantine Doukas, and describes how he was associated with Alexios in power: 'he signed notices of donations with him in purple ink, followed him with a tiara in processions and was acclaimed after him.' And Anna continues: 'So it came about that I too was acclaimed and the officers who led the acclamations linked the names of Constantine and Anna. Often in later times I have heard my relatives and parents say that this practice continued in fact over a long period.'⁵⁵ In her account, however, change is fickle and less than twenty pages later she describes her own marriage to Nikephoros Bryennios. Perhaps with a nod in the direction of propriety she does not name the daughter of Alexios whose marriage made Nikephoros *gambros* to the emperor.⁵⁶

Dealing with family at a slightly greater remove, Anna Komnene refers to Rodomer as being of Bulgarian extraction, though he was a relation on his mother's side of Irene Doukaina.⁵⁷ She identifies John Komnenos as her own paternal grandfather ('when the famous Manuel, father of the previous emperor Isaakios Komnenos and his brother John (who was my grandfather on the paternal side), was promoted supreme commander of all the east by the then emperor Basil.'⁵⁸ Anna makes passing reference to the birth of the first of the sons born to the porphyrogennete John, along with his twin sister, though it is difficult to know if this notice is because it is the first born male child and grandson of Alexios who therefore makes less likely Anna's claim on the succession, or because the boy is one of twins.⁵⁹ The short military exploit of Nikephoros the empress's nephew seems to be a 'Bryennios' tale:

Nikephoros (the empress's nephew), who was young and eager for action, rode out in front of the line, taking with him a handful of other impatient warriors. He fought at close quarters with the first Turk to charge out against him and was wounded in the knee. However, he pierced his assailant's breast with his spear and the man fell from his horse to the ground without a cry. The barbarians behind him, seeing this, turned their backs on the Romans and fled. The emperor, delighted with Nikephoros's bravery, received him on the battlefield and warmly commended him.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ *Alexiad* III i 3; Leib 1:104,16–29; Sewter, 104.

⁵⁵ *Alexiad* VI viii 3; Leib 2:62,5–17; Sewter, 197.

⁵⁶ *Alexiad* VII ii 6; Leib 2:91,8 γαμβρός Sewter, 219–220.

⁵⁷ *Alexiad* VIII iv 5; Leib 2:138,13–15; Sewter, 255.

⁵⁸ *Alexiad* XI i 6; Leib 3:9,25–28; Sewter, 335.

⁵⁹ *Alexiad* XII iv 4; Leib 3:66,12–15; Sewter, 379.

⁶⁰ *Alexiad* XV iv 8; Leib 3:203,1–12; Sewter, 483.

The episode of the death of Andronikos, Anna's brother, also seems to be part of the information relayed by Bryennios, at least before the Annan dirge takes over:

The kaisar Nikephoros Bryennios, who was in charge of the right wing, noticed the battle ranging in the rear, but for all his eagerness to help checked the anger boiling up inside him, being unwilling to expose his inexperience or youth. He earnestly marched on with ranks intact and the soldiers in perfect order. As the barbarians fought with determination, the dearest of my brothers, the Porphyrogennetos Andronikos, who was in command of the left, turned about and charged violently at them on horseback. He had just reached his young manhood, the most charming time of life, a daring soldier in war, but prudent too, with a quick hand and a fine intellect. He met his end, prematurely. In a way that none expected he left us and disappeared. His youthfulness, his physical perfection, those light vaults into the saddle – what do they mean now? My grief for him drives me to tears – but the law of history once more calls me back.⁶¹

At first glance, it would appear easy and logical to make a division between the military detail, provided perhaps by Nikephoros Bryennios and the lamentation of Anna Komnene. However, such a thesis can really only be proven by a detailed literary comparison of the work ascribed to Nikephoros Bryennios and those elements in *The Alexiad* which are held to be by him rather than by Anna Komnene.

More General Ideas of Family

There are more generalised ideas about the family and the way families work in *The Alexiad*. The way in which the emperor was swayed by Anna Dalassene's loss of two sons, not to allow the young Alexios to go to war suggests an awareness of the mother's pain, but at the same time it serves to mark Alexios out at an early age as somehow different and/or special.⁶² The reaction of his cousin Dokeianos to Alexios's supposed blinding of Roussel shows more about the native intelligence of the young warlord than it does about his relationship with his own extended kin.⁶³ Similarly Robert Guiscard's treatment of his father-in-law Gulielmus should be taken more as an indication of the untrustworthiness of barbarians in general and Robert Guiscard in particular than it can be of the proper relations between in-laws.⁶⁴ The domestic details provided of the home life of the Kaisar John Doukas when he heard of the revolt of the Komnenoi from his grandson,

⁶¹ *Alexiad* XV v 4; Leib 3:205,30–206,10; Sewter, 485.

⁶² *Alexiad* I i 1; Leib 1:9,11–20; Sewter, 31.

⁶³ *Alexiad* I iii 4; Leib 1:16,7–31; Sewter, 37.

⁶⁴ *Alexiad* I xi 5–8; Leib 1:39,24–42,21; Sewter, 54–55.

who interrupted his siesta and received boxed ears for his pains, ring true.⁶⁵ Whilst the less happy side of family life, with father-son antagonisms, is seen when George Palaiologos, siding with the Komenoi-Doukai rebels meets his father Nikephoros, who remains loyal to the emperor Nikephoros III Botaniates:

Here it was different: battle and war, father and son on opposite sides. Each was aware of the other's loyalties, though intentions had not yet been translated into action. Looking askance at George and calling him a 'fool', the father asked him. 'What have you come to do here?' 'Since it is you who ask me – nothing.' 'Hold on a little then, and if the emperor listens to my advice, you will soon know what's to be done.'⁶⁶

Botaniates does not take Nikephoros Palaiologos's advice and the father is forced to act as messenger to the triumphant Komnenoi. Family tradition could be a positive force, like Anna Dalassene's habit of praying regularly at the church of St Thekla, which Isaakios I Komnenos had built.⁶⁷ The down side of family was Robert Guiscard's use of kinship as the pretext for invading Byzantium when the Komnenian coup 'disinherited' his kin.⁶⁸

Family relationships in Byzantium and in the *Alexiad* are also 'fictive'. Nikephoros Diogenes felt able to rely on his half-brother's widow, Maria of Alania, when his plot to murder Alexios in his bath was foiled. Michael VII Doukas had reduced Nikephoros and Leo, removing them from the line of succession, but Alexios restored their position, at least in part no doubt in an attempt to spoil their role as a locus of disaffected opposition.⁶⁹ In dealing with the pretender [Constantine] Diogenes, Anna remarks that the adoptions of brothers, such as took place between the emperor Romanos Diogenes and Nikephoros Bryennios were common.⁷⁰

Conclusions

This brief survey of the role of family and family relationships in Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* shows that it is an important element in the narrative. However, what is additionally important is what is not present. For all Anna's protestations of devotion to 'her kaisar' Nikephoros Bryennios, there is no mention of the four children that their marriage produced. Anna makes only partial reference to the birth of her siblings and the lives of some go unremarked before their death in battle. The account of the Komnenian coup is a great set piece of family intrigue, with Anna Dalassene as one

⁶⁵ *Alexiad* II vi 4; Leib 1:81,18–82,1; Sewter, 87.

⁶⁶ *Alexiad* II xi 6; Leib 1:97,28–98,6; Sewter, 100.

⁶⁷ *Alexiad* III viii 10; Leib 1:129,22–26; Sewter, 124.

⁶⁸ *Alexiad* IV i 3; Leib 1:144,18–22; Sewter, 136.

⁶⁹ *Alexiad* IX v 5; Leib 2:171,30–172,4; Sewter, 279–80.

⁷⁰ *Alexiad* X iii 3; Leib 2:196,15–16; Sewter, 300–301.

guiding hand, matched on the other side by Maria of Alania. However, this is not all a feminist conspiracy as the actions of the kaisar John Doukas are clearly equivalent, intent on guarding a kin-group's access to the imperial throne. Information about how families functioned, what they read at the dinner table and how a daughter was to comport herself in the presence of her father are all contained in *The Alexiad*. Whether, however, it is possible to extrapolate from the clues provided by Anna in her text to the generality of Middle Byzantine families remains to be seen. I rather suspect not.

Anna Dalassene's creation of a 'monastery' – or at least the monastic life-style within the imperial palace was more a reaction against the excesses of palace life under Monomachos, Zoe and Skleraina, when a *ménage à trois* was enshrined in the emperor's domestic arrangements and codified in a formal 'treaty' ratified by the senate.⁷¹ Important trends of Middle Byzantine family life are present in *The Alexiad*: the extended family, the network of alliances and family connections, the raising of children by prospective mothers-in-law, the widespread 'adoption' of adults to create a quasi-familial bond. But it is impossible to reconstruct the entire network of family values from this one text. Given its nature as a celebration of the deeds of a single emperor, it would perhaps be surprising if this were possible. For all that with truth Alexios can be said to have initiated 'clan government' in the Komnenian regime, using first his mother and brother and then more widely his sons and sons-in-law to populate the bureaucracy. Nevertheless the family of the reigning emperor is the exception rather than the norm even in twelfth-century Byzantium. It may have been necessary for Manuel I Komnenos to emphasize the distinction between himself as reigning emperor and the other male members of his kindred, but membership of the imperial family was not the same as membership of other family groups.⁷²

There are other sources of information for family life in the period however. Michael Psellos' account of the life of his daughter Styliane provides an insight that that urbane scheming courtier did have a heart somewhere.⁷³ The terrifying aspect of the family home as the only secure fortress against all comers, but which must be defended at all times and on all sides, provides another example from Kekaumenos.⁷⁴ The legally minded Attaleiates, creating the unbreakable trust fund for his sole son and heir (in

⁷¹ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, Book VI lviii; Emile Renauld, *Michel Psellos Chronographie* (Budé, Paris: 1926 & 1928), 1:145,6–15; E. R. A. Sewter, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers* (Penguin, Harmondsworth: 1979), 183–184 for the 'treaty'; Psellos, *Chronographia*, VI lxiii; Renauld, 1:147,7–12; Sewter, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 186 for the rooms.

⁷² Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1993).

⁷³ A. Leroy-Molinghen, 'Styliané', *Byzantion* 39 (1969), 155–163.

⁷⁴ Kekaumenos, *Strategikon*, ed. B. Wassiliewsky and V. Jernstedt *Cecaumeni Strategicon* (St Petersburg, 1896, reprinted Amsterdam, 1965).

whom one has the distinct feeling Attaleiates does not have much confidence),⁷⁵ shows another family provision. This mirrors to an extent the creation of the monastery of Kecharitoumene by Irene Doukaina for herself and her daughters (most notably Anna Komnene herself).⁷⁶ The dominant biological function of family life as we see it – the creation and raising of children – means that we see families in a specific light. However, the fictive kinships that clearly coursed through Byzantine society at least at the higher levels, and the religious impulse to found and enter religious houses, mean that it is necessary to include in discussions of ‘family’ the religious family, the group of brothers living under the authority of their *abbas* and other ‘pretend family relationships’. The ‘truth’ (whatever that might mean) of the religious devotion of Gregory Pakourianos in founding his monastery for his warband of Georgians too far from home and too old to return, may be in doubt. But they were a family of sorts, even if their home-life was different, so very different from the home-life of our own dear Byzantine *kaisarissa* Anna Komnene.

⁷⁵ P. Gautier, ‘La Diataxis de Michel Attaliatè’, *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 39 (1981), 17–129.

⁷⁶ P. Gautier, ‘Le typhion de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè’, *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 43 (1985), 5–165.



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Women in Byzantine Novels of the Twelfth Century: an Interplay Between Norm and Fantasy*

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As the Byzantine novels of the Komnenian age are imitations of ancient novels, their authors reorganise the conventional material of the genre according to the expectations of a new, medieval readership. So in order to study women in these twelfth-century texts it is necessary to start with a survey of the image of women and the role given to them in the novels of late antiquity. Only then is it possible to evaluate the specificity of the picture conveyed by the Byzantine authors.

The way women are portrayed in the ancient novels has often been thought to reflect the relative emancipation of real-life women in Hellenistic and imperial Roman society and the new importance of the wife-husband relationship within marriage.¹ This point of view is well represented in David Konstan's book, entitled *Sexual Symmetry* (1994), which emphasises the close parallel in ancient novels between feminine and masculine roles. This 'sexual symmetry', evident from the very first encounter of the heroes, who usually fall in love with each other at once, is abundantly illustrated further on in the story. The male and female protagonists of ancient novels have the same quasi-pathological sensitivity; they are equally prone to weep

* A French and somewhat shortened version of this paper has been published in B. Pouderon (éd.), *Les personnages du roman grec* (Lyon, 2001), pp. 329–46, entitled 'Les jeunes filles dans le roman byzantin du XIIe siècle'. The English version was written in 1998 and several valuable contributions have appeared since then. J. Burton's article about abduction and elopement in the Byzantine novel (2000) is especially relevant to the woman-theme.

¹ At this time it ceased to be a mere economic strategy to become, as Michel Foucault says, a union freely consented to between two partners (1984: 90–100).

and faint; they have to suffer similar trials, being reduced to slavery, tortured or offered as sacrifice to barbarian gods; they both react in a very passive way, lamenting their own misfortunes and the sufferings inflicted on their beloved, with whom their one aim is to be reunited for ever.

When the sexual symmetry is broken, it is generally on the female protagonists' behalf, so that the Greek novel may at first seem to adopt rather a feminist point of view. The spotlight is often focused on the heroines – for example in *Chariton*, where the first half of the narrative is centred on Kallirhoe's fate – and the female characters are frequently portrayed in a more interesting and positive way than their male counterparts; this is especially true of Kallirhoe and Charikleia, these strong-minded girls whose radiance outshines the male protagonists. Kallirhoe's superiority is expressly outlined by *Chariton* at two different points in the novel: at Chaereas' pseudo-burial, when nobody looks at the young man's magnificent statue, because 'Kallirhoe was there – she alone drew all eyes to her' (4.1.10), and again at the end of the novel, when Chaereas' soldiers judge Kallirhoe lucky to have been reunited with 'such a handsome husband', until she appears. Thereafter 'no one praised Chaereas anymore; they all turned their gaze on her, as if she alone existed' (8.1.11).² In *Heliodoros'* novel which deals primarily with Charikleia's 'family romance', the heroine's superiority is also evident, particularly on the many occasions when she lectures Theagenes (*Hel.* 1.26.2–6; 5.7.1–2; 9.24.3–8; for Charikleia's courage, see 1.20.1 or 6.9.3). A clue of this bias towards the heroine is given by the unequal amount of direct speech assigned to the protagonists: for, although eighty interventions are ascribed to both of them, Theagenes' speeches amount only to about 340 lines (in the CUF edition), Charikleia's to about 520 lines, and the latter's longest speech is twice as extensive as the former's: fifty-five lines for Charikleia (1.21.3–22.7) and only twenty-five for Theagenes (2.4.1–4). Even in *Achilles Tatius'* novel, where the authorial choice of a first-person narrative from the hero's perspective gives priority to the male protagonist at the expense of the heroine, Leukippe appears in a far more positive light than Kleitophon. Whereas he is characterised by his weakness and even cowardice, the narrative repeatedly underlines Leukippe's courage and moral strength (*AT* 6.20–21; 7.13.1; for Kleitophon's cowardice, see *AT* 5.7.2; 8.1.3–5).

Yet this apparent gynaeccentrism of Greek novels is deceptive, as has been convincingly demonstrated by Brigitte Egger (1988, 1994), for it is purely emotional. The heroines' superiority and radiance are quite exclusively confined to the erotic sphere, whereas in social practice they

² All the translations of Greek novels are taken from Reardon 1989; quotations from Byzantine novels are taken from Conca 1994a.

remain constrained, devoid of autonomy and authority.³ Therefore, the world depicted in the ancient romance is factually androcentrist, and even more so than the society of the imperial age, for the novelists impose on their heroines limitations and incapacities that did not exist to the same degree for contemporary female readers; many of the legal conventions connected to marriage that are alluded to in Greek novels do not reflect contemporary practice, but are borrowed from classical times (Egger 1994: 265–71). Girls in Greek novels are expected to live a rather secluded life (see Xen. 1.4.7; Char. 1.3.1; AT 1.9.3; 2.19.5; Hel. 5.15.3; 6.11.1; 10.4.5; 10.22.4), their fate depends on their parents' (and more often solely on their father's) decision – Kallirhoe up to the day of her wedding does not know to whom she will be married (Char. 1.1.14) – and even after being dragged by the malevolence of *Tychê* out of their usual protective setting, the heroines remain more dependent than their male counterparts. This is particularly true in Chariton, Xenophon and Achilles Tatius, where Kallirhoe, Anthia and Leukippe have to endure their fates, being sold as slaves and taken from place to place for reasons beyond their control, whereas the heroes, in spite of their moral weakness, are given more possibilities for taking the initiative and more freedom of movement. They do not have to wait to be rescued, but can go in search of their beloved, playing thus a more active role in the narrative (Couraud-Lalanne 1998: 532). The ancient novelists are also prone to give more experience (particularly in sexual matters) to their male protagonists than to the heroines. With Kallirhoe's naivety Chariton contrasts Chaereas' greater understanding of life (1.2.6). Daphnis is initiated into sex by Lykainion and thence adopts a rather protective attitude towards Chloe, still ignorant of the mysteries of love. Kleitophon, although he several times protests his 'male virginity', admits, when discussing with fellow travellers the respective pleasures of hetero- and homosexuality, that he knows women 'who sell themselves for Aphrodite' (2.37.5) and he later yields to Melitte's advances, while Leukippe remains strictly faithful to him. Last but not least, the heroines of Greek novels are generally endowed with all the

³ The specifically erotic predominance of the heroine is well illustrated by the fact she is more often coveted than the hero. Only Longus gives his male and female protagonists the same number of 'suitors' (Dorkon and Lampis for Chloe, Lykainion and Gnathon for Daphnis). In the other novels dissymmetry is always in favour of heroines: whereas Kallirhoe has four 'suitors' (Dionysios, Mithridates, Pharnakes and the Great King), Chaereas does not inspire love in anybody; no less than eight men 'court' Anthia (Euxinos, Moeris, Perilaos, Psammiss, Anchialos, Amphinomos, Polyidos, Hippothoos), whereas Habrokomes has only three (female and male) lovers (Korymbos, Mantô and Kynô); in Achilles Tatius and Heliodoros the hero is pursued only by one woman (Kleitophon by Melitte and Theagenes by Arsace), whereas the heroine is desired by many men (Leukippe by Charmides, Gorgias, Chaereas, Sosthenes and Thersandros; Charikleia by Thyamis, the Tyrian merchant, Trachinos, Peloros and Achaemenes).

virtues traditionally expected of women: dignity, decency and chastity. Even Charikleia, who has received a very exceptional education, being raised only by men and having been accustomed to discuss the highest subjects with λόγιοι, shows herself very respectful of norms, in spite of her male ability in rhetoric and philosophy (Pernot 1992: 46–7). Before delivering her ‘*demegoria*’ in front of the brigand assembly, she says it would have been more fitting for Theagenes to speak instead of her, for ‘silence becomes a woman, and it is for a man to respond among men’ (1.21.3).⁴ In many other passages of the narrative too she appears to be prevented from speaking by her ‘virginal reserve’ – a *leitmotiv* in Heliodoros’s novel.⁵

The only work where the heroine takes some liberty with the code of feminine behaviour is that by Achilles Tatius, a novelist who is in many ways atypical and likes to play with the norms of the genre. At the beginning of the story Leukippe appears to be rather an emancipated girl: she is quick to encourage Kleitophon’s advances, does not hesitate to lie to her parents to meet her lover alone, and easily agrees to receive him in her room during the night. And she would soon have lost her virginity, had not her mother burst in, having been warned of her imminent defloration by a providential nightmare. Yet Achilles Tatius makes a great fuss about this virginity preserved by mere chance, and he often underlines his heroine’s purity and decency further on in the novel (AT 2.35.1; 4.1.2; 4.8.3; 4.17.5; 8.4.1), even taking the trouble to submit her to a special virginity test, which in such surroundings seems rather ironic. Equally atypical is the authorial choice made by Achilles Tatius, for, in conferring on Kleitophon the responsibility of telling the love story, he subverts the rule of (apparent) sexual symmetry usual to the genre to adopt an openly androcentric perspective – an innovation which results both in the reduced part played by Leukippe in the narrative, and in the new trend given to the lovers’ relationship, where the hero acts (or dreams of acting) more aggressively than is expected of a novel protagonist (Konstan 1994: 66).

Interestingly enough, it is the model of Achilles Tatius’ novel that the Byzantine authors choose to imitate. Prodromos and Eugenianos use the model in part, by giving the male protagonist the retrospective narrative assumed by the old Kalasiris, Charikleia’s adoptive father, in Heliodoros’ novel – which means combining the *in medias res* structure of the *Aethiopian Story* with the male lover’s perspective peculiar to Achilles Tatius. Makrembolites goes a step further and takes over the model completely, by reproducing the device of a first-person narrative and eliminating the frame

⁴ Compare Aeschylus *Sept.*, 232; Sophocles *Ajax*, 293; Euripides *Herakl.*, 476–7; *Troad.* 654–5.

⁵ Hel. 4.10.1–6; 10.18.2; 10.22.1; 10.29.5; 10.33.4. Numerous allusions are made to Charikleia’s *aidôs* throughout the novel: cf. 1.20.2; 2.7.1; 2.13.2; 10.22.1; 10.38.1. For the importance she attaches to her virginity, see 1.8.3; 1.25.4; 2.33.4–5; 5.4.5; 6.8.4 and 6.

story that served to introduce Kleitophon's confession in Achilles Tatius. The preponderance given in some of the ancient novels to the hero's speeches⁶ thus becomes a constant feature of all the Byzantine works, where the heroine's voice is always second to that of her male counterpart. Whereas Dosikles' speeches amount to around 1160 lines, Charikles' to 1043 and Hysminias' to 520 (within the first person narrative), Rhodanthe's direct addresses cover no more than 376 lines, Drosilla's 393 and Hysmine's 190. And in Prodrornos' and Eugenianos' novels, even if we do not take the heroes' retrospective narrative into account, the disproportion between the sexes remains important, with 540 lines to Dosikles and 347 to Rhodanthe, 611 lines to Charikles and 393 to Drosilla.

This dissymmetry is in keeping with the ideal of virginal modesty conveyed by the twelfth-century romances, where sexual morality is stricter, and conventions of behaviour far more restricted than those depicted in the ancient novel, a change reflecting the greater austerity of the Byzantine Christian norm (Garland 1990: 68–77, 80). Repeating the old maxim that 'Silence is a woman's ornament', the Komnenian novelists repeatedly lay stress on the reserve their heroines observe in conversation. Makrembolites notes that at Themistheus' first banquet, women drink without speaking, for 'silence makes a woman beautiful' (*HH* 5.10.2), and he puts the same remark in the mouth of Hysmine, who is unwilling to speak in the presence of her father at the end of the novel (*HH* 11.11.2). In the same circumstances, Prodrornos' heroine Rhodanthe is described as 'silent and ashamed of speaking' (*RD* 9.276); even among Manasses's fragments we find no fewer than two passages praising women's verbal temperance⁷ – an evident clue to the importance of the theme in the Byzantine novel. As they attach great value to feminine decency, our novelists give much more prominence than their Greek predecessors to the motif of virginal seclusion. Prodrornos needs all of six verses to explain how Rhodanthe's father confines her in a small tower in order to protect her from 'lovers' eager eyes' (*RD* 2.175–82); Eugenianos describes Kalligone as an equally unapproachable girl, 'protected from male view and kept hidden within her bedroom' (*DC* 2.61–2), and a vivid maxim by Manasses compares the foreigners' eyes to frightful bears virgins must avoid at all cost (fr. 119). Brought up in seclusion, virgins in Byzantine romance are bound by strict rules of behaviour: Hysmine is not

⁶ Cf. Chariton: c. 400 lines for Chaereas, c. 370 for Kallirhoe; Longus: c. 140 lines for Daphnis, c. 40 for Chloe; Achilles Tatius: c. 540 lines for Kleitophon, c. 175 for Leukippe. On the contrary, the female protagonist's voice is predominant in Xenophon (c. 190 lines for Anthia, c. 125 for Habrokomes) and in Heliodoros (c. 520 lines for Charikleia, c. 340 for Theagenes).

⁷ Fr. 12: 'I do not find it commendable, proper or decent for a young girl to chatter among so many men'; fr. 107: 'Woman, it makes a woman beautiful, and a virgin even more so, not to tire her tongue speaking vainly, but to shut the door of her mouth and avoid indulging in long and superfluous talk'.

allowed to take part in the night sacrifice to Zeus Sôter, 'for it is not fitting for virgins to come into the presence of men' (*HH* 5.15.1), and Rhodope, when dining with her parents at Hysminias' master's, is served by her own maid, Hysmine, 'so that the dignity of her virginity not be polluted, even as far as her cup or hand were concerned' (*HH* 10.7.1). Fashioned by such an upbringing, the Byzantine heroines show themselves highly respectful of proprieties. Rhodanthe at first is reluctant to attend Glaukon's banquet, for she thinks she will be the only female guest and does not want to eat with so many men and be in danger of enduring 'the base examination of a depraved eye' (*RD* 2.69–73). Dosikles much admires the girl's qualms and the only way he finds to lessen her apprehension is to point out that they are invited by Glaukon's wife, so that there is no shame attached to her taking part in the dinner.

Eugenianos similarly emphasises Drosilla's modesty. After the shipwreck, although she has spent nine days in the wilderness, eating nothing but herbs and berries, when she arrives at a village she dare not come closer, for she is ashamed 'to enter by herself' (*DC* 6.196). Later, when she has to go to Xenokrates' inn, where according to a dream she will find Charikles again, she asks her hostess, old Baryllis, to accompany her and, as she does not want to enter the inn, Baryllis asks Xenokrates' son, Kallidemes, to come outside so that the girl may question him about her beloved (*DC* 6.261–3). Disappointed in her expectation, Drosilla breaks off the conversation as soon as possible by pretending she has a headache (*DC* 6.300–1), and when, after her reunion with Charikles, she relates this episode to her lover, apparently afraid of being accused of boldness, she stresses the fact that she did not enter the inn, adding that it is a proof of her εὐχνοσύνη (*DC* 8.43). The same emphasis is laid upon Kalligone's shyness. Alluding to the girl's παιδικὴ ἀπλαστία (*DC* 2.97), Eugenianos describes in a charming way the virgin's embarrassment when first addressed by Kleandros; she does not know how to behave, laughs nervously and slaps her maid's cheeks to conceal her uneasiness.⁸ That *aidôs* is expected to be the normal state of mind of a virgin is well shown by Pantheia's comment about Hysmine's sudden headache at the announcement of her planned marriage with a compatriot. She imagines her daughter is shocked by the perspective of her imminent wedding, 'for she is a virgin and an honourable (σεμνή) girl' (*HH* 6.3.3). Although this is not a very apt definition for the only Komnenian heroine whose behaviour by no means conforms to the Byzantine norm, as we shall see further on, Hysmine indeed is not ignorant of the requirements of virginal modesty. When reunited with her parents, she at first refuses to tell the story of her

⁸ *DC* 2.107–17; of particular interest is the maxim Eugenianos has inserted about what is supposed to be typical virginal behaviour: 'Virgins who do not expect to be looked at usually turn pale when someone approaches them unawares and speaks to them by stealth' (114–17).

elopement, unwilling to be πάντολμος (*HH* 11.11.2) and she begins to weep silently. It is only after having been duly encouraged by the priest of Apollo that she resolves to speak, but she does so with the greatest discomfort: ‘dripping all over with perspiration and tears, her tongue hampered, her voice faltering, her gaze obstinately fixed on the ground’ (*HH* 11.13.1). In this passage we see a feature the Byzantines considered of primary significance in the physical behaviour of a well-educated virgin; the way she kept her eyes cast down, especially in presence of men – an attitude considered as the hallmark of modesty (Garland 1994: 297–8). Drosilla, addressed by Kleinias, carefully avoids looking at him, so that he complains about the reserved attitude of the girl, whose eyes remain obstinately ἀνθειλκυσμένοι (*DC* 4.133).

A kind of identikit picture of the decent virgin is drawn by Kleandros in his description of the various girls attending Dionysos’ festival at Phthia: the σεμνή virgin is characterised by the way she looks at the ground and tries to conceal her breast and face (*DC* 3.163 sq: ‘You bow down... and you try to hide your breast and face’). Hysmine, whose outward behaviour is also that of an ideal virgin, speaks in a low voice (*HH* 5.12.2), moves with grace and discretion (*HH* 6.1.3) and has good manners at table, taking her cup with the tips of her fingers ὡς παρθένος, and merely tasting the wine, ‘her virginal self-respect helping her to play the role’ (*HH* 5.10.4; 5.11.2). And Prodrōmos does not fail to point out the unusual character of Rhodanthe’s behaviour when, to draw the attention of Dosikles, who does not recognise her in her servile guise, she bares her arms to the elbow ‘so that he could recognize the shape of her fingers’, and she clings to him so immodestly ‘that he could not guess she was Rhodanthe, unless he knew that she really was Rhodanthe’ (*RD* 8.300–5). Such behaviour is unworthy of a well-educated girl and only exceptional circumstances excuse Rhodanthe for breaking the code of feminine reserve. The image of femininity conveyed by such passages, that of a gender bound by every kind of moral constraint, makes the Byzantine novels of the Komnenian period appear like the perfect product of a patriarchal society.

To be sure, the twelfth-century novelists, influenced by their ancient models, do not ignore the topic of sexual symmetry, and borrowing the outline of their works from Greek romance they ascribe to their male and female protagonists very similar adventures, so that in the medieval texts we find the same kinds of echoes and parallels as in the ancient novels.⁹ The

⁹ In *RD* see the parallel laments of Dosikles and Rhodanthe after their parting – a symmetry underlined by the *lemmata* (6.264–414: θρήνος Δοσικλέος ἐπὶ τῷ ναυαγίῳ Ῥοδάνθης; 7.16–160: θρήνος Ῥοδάνθης ἐπὶ Δοσικλεί). Parallel passages are particularly numerous in Eugenianos’s work: see 1.230–57, 289–352 where Charikles and Drosilla, imprisoned in separate places, lament each other’s fate; 4.77–9, 98 sq., where the Parthian king’s wife Chrysilla falls in love with

Byzantine authors even go a step further than their predecessors by strictly equating the erotic experience of their heroes with that of the heroines (for medieval male protagonists are never allowed to engage in 'extra love-affairs' and have premarital sex), and they also put great emphasis on the romantic theme of the indissoluble couple where one's fate is inextricably linked to the other's.¹⁰ Akin to this indivisibility topic is the protagonists' alleged brotherhood¹¹ – a pretext forged by the lovers to protect themselves from potential rivals, but given more credibility by the protagonists' outward resemblance in Prodhomos' novel (*RD* 3.334–5, 341–6), and by their quasi-identical names in Makrembolites – a coincidence repeatedly pointed out by Hysmine herself (*HH* 1.9.1; 2.12.2; 2.13.2). Like doubles or homonyms, the hero and the heroine seem to be interchangeable, so that the Byzantine novelists apparently carry the dream of sexual symmetry to such an extreme as to build an image of sentimental cloning.

But this impression is not corroborated by the remainder of the texts, where many passages, instead of illustrating the similarity of the sexes, sharply underline the differences between men and women. When comparing his own advantages to Rhodanthe's, Dosikles dwells on their being of radically different sorts; if Rhodanthe is beautiful, he is endowed with strength and bravery (σταθηρότης | ἀλκή κραταιά, πρὸς μάχας εὐανδρία), which is the specifically male kind of beauty (κάλλος ἀνδρικόν: *RD* 2.253 sq.). When enslaved by the brigands, he contrasts his male strength with Rhodanthe's feminine delicacy and worries about her: 'as a man I have grown up in the midst of battles ..., but how will Rhodanthe endure sufferings, being a woman used to the bedroom's comfort' (*RD* 1.116 sq.). The same feeling is expressed by Charikles who pities Drosilla more than himself, for she is 'a female ... and a young and virgin girl' (*DC* 6.125). In Makrembolites the opposition between male and female appears in a different context, that of amorous behaviour. A debate on the subject arises between Hysmine and Hysminias, for Hysminias claims that women (τὸ θῆλυ) are naturally warmer and more prone to change than men, and

Charikles, and her son Kleinias with Drosilla; later Kleinias takes Charikles as his confidant (4.220 sq.), whereas Chrysilla uses Drosilla as a go-between (5.239); in 5.61 Drosilla reveals Chrysilla's love to Charikles, in 5.98 sq. he discloses Kleinias's feelings to her; and in 5.434–8 Chrysilla follows her son to death, so that both protagonists are rid of their rivals at the same time; finally, 6.34–94, 205–35 offer a new set of parallel laments of the protagonists after their parting.

¹⁰ See *RD* 6.168 (ἀλληλοπενθεῖς ἦσαν ἢ συζυγία); 7.93–4 ('Just as shadows cannot exist without bodies, Rhodanthe cannot exist without Dosikles'); *DC* 1.304 (Drosilla and Charikles as a couple are said to be an ἀδιάρρηκτον ἀλληλουχίαν); 6.82–5 ('O sweet togetherness of breath and growth, union and concord of two souls, hearts who always share the same spirit, the same mind, the same language, the same feelings, the same ideas').

¹¹ A motif already used in ancient novels: *Hel.* 1.21.3 sq; 7.12 sq; 9.24 sq.

Hysmine, who obviously disagrees, answers ironically that she is very lucky to hear about greater male steadfastness (*HH* 9.23.1–2). That a reflection about femininity and masculinity is central to the Byzantine novels can also be inferred from the long episode of Prodromos' work where the barbarian Gobryas tells the ambassador Artaxanes that his master Mistylos, being able to make roast lambs give birth to living birds, can also make men give birth to dogs, so that the naïve Artaxanes, greatly impressed by this absurd lie, repeatedly expresses his fear that soldiers like himself may be forced to suffer the wretched fate of women (*RD* 4.173–88; 5.56–72).

Other passages in Prodromos' novel underline in a less ludicrous way the necessity for men to behave according to the rules of their sex and, particularly, not to weep like women – which was almost the norm in the Greek novel. Kratandros several times blames Dosikles for his excessive sentimentality: in book I he urges him to put an end to his tears: 'Give up lamenting and endless weeping: for floods of tears befit women' (*RD* 1.149–50). In book VI, after Rhodanthe's false death, Kratandros does allow Dosikles to mourn for his beloved, but he does not fail to add that excessive gestures of sorrow are unworthy of men: 'Such behaviour is not manly, yet is tolerable from a love-smitten soul' (*RD* 6.444–5). Finally in book VIII, while admitting that Dosikles's misfortune has been far beyond *πάν μέτρον δακρύων* (279), he reproaches him with letting his grief last longer than suitable: 'it is not fitting for a man's heart to lament endlessly' (*RD* 8.282–3). It is possible that such statements were suggested to Prodromos partly by the model of Greek tragedy, which conveys the same ideal of manliness¹² – for the author of *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* seems to have been much influenced by ancient drama. To be sure, we do not find the same condemnation of male sensitivity in the other Byzantine novels; yet Eugenianos and Makrembolites often stress the propensity of women to tears, as did Prodromos. Of Dosikles' mother the latter said: 'She was a woman ready to weep, a mother inclined to shed many tears' (*RD* 2.361–2). Eugenianos speaks in the same words of his heroine Drosilla, when describing her visit to Kalligone's grave and the tears she sheds over a girl she never met, but only knew by hearsay: 'The race of women is very prone to compassion: it is ready to mourn even others' sufferings, and is immediately given to weeping' (*DC* 9.220 sq.). Although Makrembolites does not theorise about women and tears, the mothers he portrays are nevertheless prone to impressive exhibitions of sorrow, as proved by Pantheia's behaviour when an unfavourable sacrifice seems to foretell misfortune to her daughter. She cannot help mourning with a violence which Hysminias' father can only excuse by referring to her motherly nature (*HH* 6.15.2). The same tendency

¹² Cf. Euripides *Heracles*, 1353–6; in Greek tragedy tears belong exclusively to the feminine world: cf. Sophocles *Ajax*, 580; Euripides *Medea*, 928; *Heracles*, 536.

of mothers to lament endlessly is illustrated by the reunion episode for although the heroes' fathers are supposed to weep more vehemently than their mothers, we must notice that the speeches ascribed to the latter are much longer than the fathers' speeches.¹³

Stress is laid upon female sensitivity and sympathetic nature. Women in Byzantine novels often appear protective. In Prodhomos we can see Rhodanthe tenderly drying Dosikles' tears (*RD* 3.527–9); Makrembolites pictures Hysminias asleep with his head resting on Hysmine's knees (*HH* 7.7.1), and in Eugenianos' novel Charikles, explaining what a comfort the presence of Drosilla was to him, compares her to a beautiful tree in whose shade he found shelter (*DC* 6.62–5). This protective function is naturally also connected with maternal figures, as in Prodhomos' novel, where Dosikles, who has just fallen in love with Rhodanthe, goes weeping to his mother, falls on her bosom and appeals to her μητρική εὐσπλαγχνία (*RD* 2.358), sure of finding her understanding and helpful.¹⁴ We also find in Byzantine novels other female secondary characters distinguished by their kindness and comforting attitude. That is the case of old Baryllis, the φίλοις καρδία (*DC* 7.37) who comes to Drosilla's help with such generosity that Charikles tells her she has been like a second mother to his beloved (*ibid.* 204). Even female rivals, whom we might expect to be described in a negative way as opposing figures, are not devoid of specifically 'feminine' virtues: Myrilla, the daughter of Rhodanthe's masters, is tender enough to be deeply moved by the heroine's laments and she becomes her confidante without regard for the girl's servile condition (*RD* 7.161–93). She also behaves with much compassion towards Dosikles, worries about his sadness and revives him when he faints at Rhodanthe's reappearance (*RD* 8.242–59, 365–6), and had she not been spoiled by jealousy, she would have been a very appealing character. Rhodope, whose function in Makrembolites's narrative is very similar to Myrilla's, except that she never becomes a danger to the heroes, who make a fool of her, is depicted in an even more positive way, as a very sweet, if rather naïve young girl, who treats Hysminias with much kindness, revives him when unconscious and sympathises with his pain (*HH* 9.14.2). She also behaves in a friendly way with Hysmine, her confidante and go-between (*HH* 9.15.1; 10.7.1).

Indeed feminine friendship does not seem to be so alien to the Byzantine novels as it was to their ancient models, where examples of solidarity among

¹³ Thirty-three lines are devoted to Hysminias's mother's *threnē* (*HH* 10.10.4–14), and thirty-six to Pantheia's (10.11.1–11), whereas seventeen lines are enough to report both fathers' laments (10. 12.1–6).

¹⁴ Cf. particularly *RD* 2.350 sq., where Dosikles says: 'I could not find any comfort anywhere; so throwing myself into my mother's bosom, I told her: O mother...'. This passage seems to be a reworking of Longus 3.26.2, where Daphnis reveals to his mother his desire to marry Chloe.

women were something of an exception (Egger 1988: 48–51 n.7). The idea of a ‘women’s race’ occurs several times in the medieval works; Prodhomos’ heroine, Rhodanthe, mentally addresses her ‘fellow virgins’ in love (πληθὺς παρθένων συμπαρθένων | αἷς εἰς ἐραστάς ... πόθος), for whom she intends to be an example in dying of passion (*RD* 7.117–23). In a song to Kalligone, whom he tries to seduce, Kleandros alludes to the γυναικεῖον φύλον sent by Zeus for men’s sorrow, in a way reminiscent of the Hesiodic myth of Pandora (*DC* 2.357–60; cf. Hes. *Op.* 60–105). In Makrembolites’ novel similar curses against the female race are uttered by Kratisthenes who, blaming Hysminias for having forgotten family and homeland for Hysmine’s sake, quotes verses from Euripides’ *Medea* against ‘women wicked in everything, *unable to perform noble deeds, but most skilful architects of every sort of harm*’ (*HH* 3.9.6; cf. Eur. *Medea*, 408–9). But the best illustration of the ‘women’s race’ topic appears in one of Hysminias’ numerous dreams, for the hero, obviously ashamed of his flirtation with Hysmine, dreams of the girl’s mother assembling an army of women in order to punish him. She appeals to the host of mothers who keep watch on their daughters’ virginity and reveals to them the deceitful behaviour of Hysminias, and calls for his death (*HH* 5.3.4–4.1). This army of women, partly a creation of Hysminias’ subjectivity and a projection of his guilty conscience, is compared with the mythical tribe of Danaids and Lemnians, an equation that strengthens even more the terrifying character of the image of femininity conveyed in such a passage.

Yet the terrible Pantheia is a special case in the Byzantine novel, and perhaps she is so impressive just because she is always described through Hysminias’ eyes (for in fact she does little more than weep and offer verbal violence). There are no other instances of dreadful women in the twelfth-century texts. For example, Chrysilla, the wife of the Parthian king Kratylus, could have been an equivalent of the formidable Arsake in Heliodoros’ novel, but after she gets rid of her husband and is in a position to do what she pleases with Charikles, with whom she is in love, she does not become a tyrannical mistress, but kills herself, for her son has died during the war against the Arabian king Chagos (*DC* 5.434–8). That Byzantine novelists have deliberately put aside the (apparently) powerful and domineering woman type is suggested by the criticism which, according to Psellos, many contemporary readers addressed to Heliodoros for having endowed Charikleia with language unfit for a female character.¹⁵ Indeed we cannot find a single case of a masculine woman in the Komnenian novels. Even

¹⁵ Psellos 1986: 93: ‘But, as for the point which, I know, a great many persons find fault with, namely the fact that the author cannot get Charikleia’s speech to sound womanly or feminine but, contrary to the art, her language has been raised to a more sophistic tone – I myself do not know how to praise this adequately. The author has not introduced a character like ordinary girls, but an initiate...’

Hysmine could not be alleged to be such, although she shows herself rather more enterprising than her male counterpart, and several times distinguishes herself by her acuteness: for instance, when she cleverly interprets the aborted sacrifice as a mark of Zeus's opposition to her marriage with a compatriot, Hysminias' father compliments her on her συνέσεως (*HH* 6.14.4). She often takes the initiative, not only in seducing Hysminias, but also in inventing the stratagem of passing him off as her brother in order to deceive her mistress Rhodope and be allowed to converse freely with him. As for Prodrornos' and Eugenianos' heroines, Rhodanthe and Drosilla, they are characterised by their weakness and submissive attitude. The former's intellectual inferiority even seems to be suggested by the deliberation scene of book IX. After Myrilla's attempted murder of Rhodanthe, the two lovers discuss decisions to take about the future, and the heroine, afraid of her rival's jealousy, rather thoughtlessly proposes that they flee from Cyprus. Dosikles immediately proves this to be a misconceived solution, because they have nowhere to go and might fall into even greater dangers (*RD* 9.12–123). Two passages of Dosikles' answer even imply that Rhodanthe is something of a fool (*RD* 9.93: 'If you subject the whole affair to deliberation and observation...'; 98: 'First of all there would be need of deliberation and reason...').

The sexism of Byzantine writers appears clearly in their use of the abduction motif, which they treat very differently from the ancient novelists. In the Greek texts abduction was always committed by the heroic couples' opponents and it was bound to fail¹⁶ – with one exception in Achilles Tatius, where Kalligone's abduction by Kallisthenes, two secondary characters, unexpectedly ends in a love match (*AT* 2.13–18; 8.17). When the heroes themselves escape from their parents' houses, they do so by mutual consent, so that their flight takes the form of an elopement, and not of an abduction.¹⁷ If in Heliodoros' work Theagenes and Charikleia's elopement is disguised as an abduction, it is only to deceive the girl's adoptive father, Charikles, but the protagonists act in agreement at Kalasiris' instigation (cf. *Hel.* 4.17.4). Things are very different in Byzantine novels – at least in Prodrornos and

¹⁶ Cf. Longus 2.20 (Chloe's abduction by the Methymnians); 4.28 (Chloe's abduction by the herdsman Lampis); *AT* 5.7 (Leukippe's abduction by Chaereas); 6.4 (Leukippe's abduction by Sosthenes). To these examples can be added mythical abductions alluded to within the narrative, such as Europa's abduction by Zeus in 1.1.

¹⁷ Cf. *AT* 2.27.3: Kleitophon, Satyros and Kleinias decide to ask the girl if she wants to elope with them 'and if she were willing to accompany us in our flight, to act accordingly; if not, to remain at home and put ourselves in the hands of fortune'. But Leukippe, infuriated by her mother's reproaches, makes the first move and of her own accord asks to be taken away (2.30.1–2).

Eugenianos, for Makrembolites follows his ancient models on this matter.¹⁸ Prodromos' hero, having fallen in love with Rhodanthe at first sight, as usual in these romances, immediately wants to marry her, but he fails to get her hand for she is already engaged to someone else; he thus decides to abduct her, with the help of some fellow-hunters, knowing nothing of her feelings. He will have her, whether she wills it or not, ἄκουσαν ἢ θέλουσαν (*RD* 2.441). Fortunately the girl is also in love with him, and the first words she addresses to her abductor are to tell him how happy she is to be snatched away by him – but she had no say in the decision. If Charikles in Eugenianos' novel does not behave so authoritatively, he nevertheless thinks of abducting Drosilla as soon as he meets her. But unlike Dosikles he reveals his purpose to the girl before acting – not, actually, to know her opinion (he seems to be convinced, and rightly, that she will agree), but because he thinks the whole business will be easier with Drosilla as an accomplice (*DC* 3.373–9). The girl, of course, is delighted by Charikles' proposal, being, as expected, in love with him. Yet, as noted by Roderick Beaton (1995: 87–8), 'what would for the purpose of story be an elopement is described uncompromisingly in terms of an abduction'. This departure of twelfth-century romances from their ancient models may be due to the influence of the epic *Digenes Akrites*, as suggested by Beaton, for bride-snatching is the norm 'in the macho imaginative world' of Digenes. If a form of the epic was already circulating when Prodromos and Eugenianos composed their works – which seems likely – it is possible that the novelists borrowed the sexist motif of abduction from a text apparently much valued by the public of the time.¹⁹

Another sexist topic that plays an undeniable part in Byzantine novels, at least in Eugenianos and Makrembolites, is what might be called 'the war between the sexes'. Though this topic was not unknown to Greek novelists, they used it exclusively to describe the opponents' attitude toward the protagonists and did not apply it, except on rare occasions, to the heroes' relationship. Harmony prevails between male and female protagonists of the ancient novels. When Charikleia asks Theagenes to respect her virginity, he not only yields to her will, but protests his pure intents (4.18.6). Daphnis is so frightened by Lykainion's warnings about deflowering Chloe who, during this 'sort of wrestling match', will cry out and weep and bleed heavily, that he no longer dares approach the girl. For he does not want her 'to cry out as

¹⁸ Cf. *HH* 6.9.2–3: when Hysminias proposes to her that she elope with him, Hysmine answers, 'I am your Hysmine, I belong to you, take me off', and she at once stands up to follow him, 'or rather, she was running ahead and dragging me', so that he is obliged to remind her that nothing is yet ready for the flight.

¹⁹ The epic of Digenes is alluded to twice in Ptochoprodromos's satire *Against the Higoumens*, a text addressed to the emperor Manuel I Komnenos (ed. Eidencier 1991: 4.189–92, 542–4).

though he was an enemy or weep as if she was hurt or bleed as if she was wounded' (3.19–20). Only in Achilles Tatius can we find some hints of a more aggressive conception of a couple's relationship for, as noted by D. Konstan (1994: 66 n.2), Kleitophon imagines his passion for Leukippe on the model of pursuer and pursued, like Apollo and Daphne or Zeus and Europa (1.5.7) – which means subverting 'the usual structure of the primary amatory relationship in the Greek novel'. Further on, his cousin's advice encourages him to adopt an enterprising attitude and disregard Leukippe's possible refusal. According to Kleinias, women even when complaisant to the deed 'prefer to appear compelled, that they avert the shame of consent by the shame of constraint' (1.10.6). He makes much use of martial metaphors to describe what he thinks to be the right way of courting girls, so that Kleitophon, blaming himself for being 'a spineless soldier in the service of a virile god' (2.5.1), tries to behave with greater boldness toward Leukippe. But he does not have to fight very hard, for the girl, even if she is said to resist 'in appearance' his first kisses (2.7.7), soon shows herself very co-operative, so that these gestures toward a more active part for Kleitophon as a lover of Leukippe remain largely ironic. Moreover, after the elopement the protagonists' relationship returns to the norm, and the parity between hero and heroine characteristic of Greek novel is restored. When Kleitophon wants to behave with 'manly energy' (ἀνδρίζεσθαι) towards Leukippe, she refuses, speaking of an apparition of Artemis, and he does not insist, for he has had precisely the same dream (4.1.2–4).

There is a similar episode in Prodnomos' novel. After Glaukon's banquet when Rhodanthe and Dosikles find themselves *en tête à tête* in their host's garden, for the first time since their elopement, Dosikles asks the girl φανῆναι καὶ γυναιῖχα (RD 3.65), but she refuses, claiming an apparition of the god Hermes, who has announced to her that their marriage would be consummated only after their return to Abydos. Dosikles immediately renounces his intent, as recalled in his narrative of book III (RD 3.76–7). If Prodnomos' hero shows absolute respect for his beloved's will, things are different in Eugenianos' rewriting of this garden episode, where the topic of war between the sexes comes to the fore. Charikles is more loquacious than Dosikles in making his request to Drosilla, trying to convince her to imitate birds and trees and yield to the universal power of love. She opposes his request with much steadfastness, saying: 'Do not strain yourself, do not use violence, do not take trouble in vain: for a chaste girl is not allowed to behave shamefully' (DC 8.141–2). She almost accuses him of treating her like a whore (ὡς ἐταίρίς), refusing to betray her virginity 'with no consideration for her father and mother' (DC 8.145–6). Charikles keeps insisting, with the result that he makes Drosilla angry enough to say: 'it is not Drosilla that you have on your mind, it seems, but the pleasant act of a

wild Eros' (*DC* 8.181–2).²⁰ Many other passages of Eugenianos' novel work out the motif of war between the sexes, for example Kleandros' letters to his beloved Kalligone, where he compares her to Pandora, that plague of mankind (*DC* 2.308). The words addressed by the young men to the girls attending the Dionysos festival are for the most part of an aggressive kind: despised lovers rejoice at seeing their beloved suffer in their turn, they laugh at proud women punished by the coming of age, and the general tone of the whole passage is one of malevolence and enmity.²¹ Even enamoured girls do not show gentleness, but prefer to turn to threats in order to conceal their feelings (*DC* 3.225–8). Such an attitude is criticised by Kallidemos as a perversion of his time, which he contrasts with Daphnis and Chloe's golden age, where mutual love prevailed (cf. *DC* 6.452–5). He complains that girls tyrannise men, even when struck by ἀντέρωτι δακνοχαρδίῳ, and obstinately affect to be reluctant so as to make their loved ones unhappy (*DC* 6.456–66).

This opposition between Greek and Byzantine ideas about love, underlined by Eugenianos' character, is even more visible in Makrembolites' novel, where war between the sexes becomes a prevalent theme. It first appears at the very beginning of the work, when Hysmine, among other advances to Hysminias, holds back the bowl she offers him and this leads to a contest of hands, ἔρις ἐν χερσίν, in which Hysminias is beaten, 'and a virgin girl's hand defeats that of a male virgin and herald' (*HH* 1.9.3). But, further on in the novel, roles are inverted and Hysminias becomes the offender, for he repeatedly makes attempts on his fiancée's virtue, either in dream or in 'reality', and all the erotic episodes are described in terms of fighting. Trying to protect her virginity, Hysmine, contracts (ὅλη συστέλλεται) and strengthens her breast like an *akropolis*, but by these defensive gestures she merely induces Hysminias to attack with greater violence (*HH* 3.7.1–5). Their meeting in Sosthenes' garden is pictured as a fight between Desire and Chastity, and Hysminias, who is not moved by Hysmine's tears, is only prevented from satisfying his lust by a providential mishap: 'But the water of Shame did not overwhelm Eros' fire, and I was about to get the crown, and Eros would have prevailed over Chastity, had not someone appeared at the door, looking for Hysmine (what a misfortune!)' (*HH* 4.23.3). Similar scenes occur twice more in the novel: although Hysmine repeatedly begs Hysminias to spare her virginity, he does not put an end to his erotic pursuit ... but never achieves his aim (*HH* 5.17; 7.4.1–5.1)!

²⁰ The aggressive nature of Charikles's behaviour in this passage is stressed, at 8.139, by the lemma: ἐνθα Δροσίλλα Χαρικλέα βιαζόμενον παραιτεῖται.

²¹ Cf. *DC* 3.190 sq.: 'You caused offence, now be offended, thrice unhappy one! You scorned me – I shall scorn you! You suffer? I suffered first! You feel distressed? I felt so before!' For women and age, see 3.174–89.

Such episodes are a novelty of Byzantine romance; they have no equivalent in the works of antiquity. Built upon a new image of manliness, more aggressive and conquering (at least in erotic matters) than that conveyed in Greek novels, they are characteristic of the twelfth-century taste for erotic innuendo. They also show the novelists' liking for playing with norms, for although Byzantine male protagonists often dream of having sex with their beloved, they never actually do so, hindered as they are by the rules of the genre, which requires the heroine to remain a virgin till the end of the story, when marriage finally takes place. Indeed Byzantine novels lay stress upon the (especially female) protagonists' virginity with far greater insistence than their ancient models, whose heroes sometimes married at the very beginning of the work. This quite obsessive concern with virginity appears clearly in the conclusion of the three extant Komnenian novels, where the heroes' reward for preserving their physical integrity in spite of numerous trials and temptations is to be allowed to make love together with the unanimous consent of family and society. Prodromos says somewhat euphemistically: 'Rhodanthe had experience of her bridegroom Dosikles' (*RD* 9.486), while Eugenianos is more explicit: 'Being still a virgin at eve, at dawn the girl arose from bed a woman' (*DC* 9.299–300), and Makrembolites focuses on his hero's impatience while waiting for the wedding night (*HH* 11.19.4). If Prodromos and Eugenianos often stress their heroine's virginity, in Makrembolites's novel the motive of παρθενία becomes an intruding *leitmotiv*.²² Yet this omnipresent concern with virginity is on a par with the ribald tone of the work, for *Hysmine and Hysminias* is by far the most erotic of the twelfth-century novels. Prodromos indeed is rather discreet about his protagonists' physical link and lays little stress on *aphrodisia*. By contrast, sex is given great prominence in Eugenianos, whose work was much influenced by the erotic epigrams. In the Dionysos festival episode, girls are seen exclusively as objects of desire, whom young men come to see and court (*DC* 3.111–13), and several other passages dwell upon the pleasures of love, for example Kallidemos' long declaration to Drosilla, where the young innkeeper expresses his lust very straightforwardly, without regard for the girl's virginal modesty. He even dares tell her: 'Let's hope you undress your body and your bare limbs come close to my bare limbs' (6.640–1). But Makrembolites far outdoes Eugenianos as far as eroticism is concerned, for he even describes what appears to be a 'wet dream' of Hysminias (Alexiou

²² See, for example, Prodromos *RD* 2.62–9, 410; 6.117; 7.18, 115–16; Eugenianos *DC* 7.255–7; 8.139 sq; Makrembolites *HH* 5.17.4 (where virginity is called τὰ κάλλιστα); 7.9.4; 7.11.5; 9.9.1 and 3; 9.16.5 (where Hysmine speaks of τὸ τῆς παρθενίας κάλλος); 11.17–18 (virginity test); 11.21.2. The same concern for virginity also appears in connection with secondary characters: like Hysmine, her rival Rhodope is very proud of having preserved the treasure of her virginity (10.2.1).

1977: 41) and he does not hesitate to make his hero fancy himself bathing with Hysmine (which was strictly forbidden)²³ and playing various erotic games with her (*HH* 5.1.3–4). If Hysminias is not content with dreams and carries his advances very far indeed – as he himself acknowledges, when he reminds Hysmine that she wears all over her body marks of his caresses and kisses (*HH* 6.6.5) – it is true, as has often been remarked, that the most risqué passages occur in oneiric episodes and not in waking ones, a peculiarity which confers on Makrembolites' eroticism an essentially suggestive character (Alexiou 1977: 42 n.62).

Makrembolites' use of the dream device obviously complies with the purpose of avoiding moral censorship and making fun of the constraints of the genre; he can save the heroes' untouchable virginity while giving free rein to his erotic fantasy, for the readers' greater delight. A similar authorial trick appears in book IX of his work, with the motif of alleged brotherhood, for Hysmine, pretending to be Hysminias's sister, serves Rhodope as a go-between, taking advantage of her role to converse freely with Hysminias and kiss and be kissed by him on her mistress's behalf. Makrembolites uses the device of a 'split personality' as a pretext to a new erotic play of a rather perverse kind. Through the 'double' Hysmine Hysminias means to enjoy Rhodope's supreme favours, while preserving his fiancée's virginity: 'I shall pick all the grapes of this vine, while keeping the virginity of this my Hysmine (and yours) inviolate and unspoilt (except by kisses)' (*HH* 9.19.3). We find a similar play with split personality in Eugenianos' novel, when Charikles, pretending to comfort his master Kleinias, in love with Drosilla, tells him of his alleged affair with an imaginary charming girl, who is certainly the heroine's double, as suggested by Conca (1986: 125–6; 1994b: 106–7). She is, like Drosilla, a secluded virgin but, unlike the heroine, does not behave in accordance with the code of feminine decency, for to Charikles' declaration she is told to answer with erotic invitations of a most explicit kind, comparing herself with a fruit to be eaten, a bunch of grapes to be pressed, a tree to be embraced (*DC* 4.267–88). As suggested by Conca, the whole scene certainly must be viewed as a fanciful projection of Charikles' desire; here he takes advantage of an intimacy of which he has not yet had his share.

If the advances of the imaginary girl in Eugenianos' novel are a product of his hero's fantasy, it is no longer true for Hysmine's shameless behaviour at the beginning of Makrembolites' work. For the girl, having fallen in love

²³ The prohibition of mixed bathing, issued by the fourth-century Council of Laodicea, was repeated and enforced at the end of the seventh century as canon 77 of the Council *In Trullo*; and Balsamon's commentary makes it plain that it was still current in the twelfth century, even when the bathers were husband and wife: cf. Berger 1982: 41–5; Magdalino 1990: 170; text in G.A. Rhalles & A. Potles, *Syntagma* II, Athens, 1852, 483–5.

with Hysminias, shrinks from no indecency to draw the boy's attention: she whispers to him, plays 'footsie' with him, touches his hands, moans and sighs, not to speak of other niceties – which arouses her mother's attention and towering rage. Such boldness on a heroine's part is a unique case in Byzantine novels and has no precedent either in Greek literature, where aggressive female sexuality is always linked with older, often married women, usually of low social condition or of Oriental origin (Alexiou 1977: 36 n.62).²⁴ To be sure, at the beginning of Xenophon's novel, when struck by Habrokomes' love, Anthia is described as paying no more attention to modesty: 'what she said was for Habrokomes to hear, and she revealed what she could of her body for Habrokomes to see' (Xen. 1.3.2). But Xenophon seems very concerned to present this casual offence to virginal reserve as an oddity, due to the emotion the sight of Habrokomes has aroused in his heroine, and like Leukippe's easy acceptance of Kleitophon's courtship in Achilles Tatius, it has nothing to do with Hysmine's sexual provocation in the [first chapters](#) of Makrembolites' work. Once again, the Byzantine novelist is obviously playing with norms, in constructing a heroine who defies all the stereotypes of the genre.²⁵ Hysmine seems to be putting into practice the advice given to Kleitophon by his servant Satyros about the best way of courting girls: 'And you must pursue your siege with more than eye contact. Speak to her with a greater sense of urgency [...]. Touch her hand; squeeze her fingers; sigh deeply' (AT 2.4.3–4; cf. Conca 1994b: 96 n.65) – as if Makrembolites had chosen to invert roles and assign to his heroine the part played by the hero of the ancient novel. Indeed Hysmine is the daughter of Hysminias' host, as Kleitophon was the son of Leukippe's in Achilles Tatius, and she falls in love with her father's guest, once again like Kleitophon (cf. Nilsson 2001: 250 sq).

Makrembolites' liking for ironic inversion also appears in the greater erotic radiance he gives his male protagonist. For in contrast to what is usual in the genre, where the heroine is courted by 'extra' suitors,²⁶ in Makrembolites Hysminias is more often courted than Hysmine. While the girl has no 'extra' suitors, Hysminias arouses love from another virgin, Rhodope, and from a married woman, his master's wife. By this dissymmetry which is perhaps due to the egocentric viewpoint characteristic of the work,

²⁴ In Greek novels, erotically active women are usually opposing characters, like Kyno or Manto in Xenophon, Lykainion in Longus, and Demaenete or Arsake in Heliodoros: cf. Egger 1988: 51–5.

²⁵ On the importance of literary play and irony in twelfth-century novels, see Cupane 1998: 169–71, esp. 170 n.10: 'Un'inversione tematica di sapore parodico è ... quella di attribuire l'iniziativa amorosa al personaggio femminile'.

²⁶ In Prodhomos, Rhodanthe is courted by Dryas and Gobryas, Dosikles only by Myrilla; in Eugenianos, Drosilla has two 'extra suitors', Kleinias and Kallidemos, whereas only Chrysilla falls in love with Charikles.

Makrembolites clearly puts aside the principle of emotional gynocentrism which was the norm of the Greek novel.

The masculine-centred perspective adopted by the Byzantine novelist also explains Hysmine's apparent metamorphosis in the second part of the narrative. After showing herself in an extremely brazen fashion, she unexpectedly begins to act more in accordance with the rules of female propriety – a change which is not so inconsistent as it may seem at once, for it occurs after Hysminias' oneiric initiation into love and thus reflects the boy's new way of looking at Hysmine. When touched by desire, he stops being amazed by the heroine's advances, becomes anxious to obtain her supreme favours, and even starts finding her too shy (Alexiou 1977: 32 n.62). According to Alexiou, Makrembolites thus offers his readers 'an insight into female behaviour as viewed by men'.

The question remains where Makrembolites got the idea of giving his heroine the initiative in courtship. Does he pretend to carry to extremes a trend merely suggested in Xenophon's or Achilles Tatius' novels, and to draw a pleasant picture of the moral freedom of pagan antiquity, such as was rather improperly fancied by twelfth-century orthodox readers?²⁷ Or may foreign influences account for a setting which in Greek context is quite unusual? Much has been said about possible links between twelfth-century Byzantine novels and western literature, courtly romance or troubadour lyric poetry (Cupane 1973/74; Jeffreys 1980; Beaton 1996: 18–21, 72–3, 80–1, 211–2). On the occasion of the Second Crusade contacts indeed intensified between East and West, and the role played at the Komnenian court by western-born princesses, many of whom were desirous of being patrons of literature, makes all the more likely the interest of Byzantine scholars in western literary production, that may have prompted the reappearance of the genre of the Greek novel in Constantinople. The question of western influence on Makrembolites' novel has given rise to especially intense speculation, probably because of the work's innovative character. As far as the heroine's sexual aggressiveness is concerned, it seems tempting to suppose an influence of western *chansons de geste*, a genre which was flourishing by the mid-twelfth century and may have been brought to Byzantium by crusaders in oral form. In these texts it is indeed normal practice for the initiative in erotic matters to belong to girls, and not to male protagonists, who are usually more reserved and slower to fall in love. Girls are the first not only to declare their feelings, but also to ask for sexual

²⁷ Cf. Jouanno 1996: 182 and n.44. For the exaggerated idea the Byzantines had of Greek freedom, see Arethas's comment on chapters 8–9 of Lucian's *Banquet* (where it is said that women and men attend the dinner at one and the same table): 'Take notice that at weddings the Ancients let women eat together with men at the same table and made them sit facing men – which is not becoming (σμερνόν)' (Kougeas 1913: 258).

gratification, and it sometimes takes time before the heroes reciprocate their amorous feelings.²⁸ This does not mean that western *chansons de geste* portray their heroines as completely devoid of decency, for they offer themselves in all honesty, always requiring marriage as well as sexual pleasures. Nor can we say that the authors of these texts adopt a feminist viewpoint in putting to the fore the feelings and behaviour of their heroines at the expense of the male protagonists, for they use the device of feminine advances to underline their heroes' irresistible charms – courtship thus serving the epic magnification of the masculine character.

Yet if Makrembolites borrowed the idea of an erotically active virgin from the *chansons de geste*, he did not work out the motif till the end and remained faithful to the Graeco-Byzantine norm of preserving the heroine's physical integrity. But he makes such a fuss of respecting this norm that his respect appears absolutely ironical, as does his insistence upon his heroes' outward correctness of behaviour. For Hysmine and Hysminias act in accordance with forms of decency rather than with decency itself, and Makrembolites is very clear about this, as shown by his frequent use of words pointing to simulation and hypocrisy. If the theme of concealment is prominent in Pantheia's curses on Hysminias, for the indignant mother repeatedly accuses the hero of having put on a semblance of virginity in order to seduce her daughter (*HH* 5.3.6–7; 10.11.5), it also occurs in many other passages of the narrative. At the beginning of the work when Hysmine makes advances to Hysminias, she nevertheless tries to keep the appearance of modesty, carefully concealing her amorous bows and nods, as for example during the second banquet, where 'she conceals (καθυποκλέπτει) her greeting by slightly and imperceptibly bending her neck' (2.12.1).²⁹ The same verb *υποκλέπτω* is used again and again, on a par with terms such as *καθυποκρίνομαι* or *υποπλάττομαι*, to describe the hidden kisses or caresses Hysmine later gives Hysminias, while pretending to offer resistance to his

²⁸ Cf. de Combarieu du Gres 1979: 352–77. Examples of feminine advances can be found in French *chansons de geste* of the second half of the twelfth century or the beginning of the thirteenth, such as *Floovant*, where beautiful Maugalie is first to address the hero and declare her love to him (14.432 sq; ed. S. Andolf, Uppsala, 1941); see also *Gui de Nanteuil*, where Eglantine similarly makes the first move and at once gives her hand in marriage to Guy (502 sq; ed. M.P. Meyer, Paris, 1861), or the contemporary Anglo-Norman *Romance of Horn*, where Rigmel, having managed to obtain a meeting with Horn, immediately proffers her love and places herself and her possessions at his disposal – whereas Horn remains more reserved, if not unwilling (1100 sq; M.K. Pope (ed.), 2 vols, *Anglo-Norman Texts* IX–X, Oxford, 1955–64).

²⁹ See also *HH* 5.6.4: 'While bending my head, I concealed (υπέκλεψα) my greeting; and she, pretending (καθυποκριθεῖσα) to arrange her tunic, greeted me in return more openly'; 6.1.3: 'I greeted her, while amorously concealing (καθυποκλέπτων) my greeting; and, as was proper, she concealed her greeting in return (ἀνθυπέκλεψεν), bending her neck in virginal fashion.'

desire.³⁰ And when in books IX–X they find each other as slaves, concealment persists, although in a different way for, if they exchange kisses more freely, they have to do so under the mask of brotherhood (for example *HH* 9.19.1). Repeated expressions such as ὡς παρθένος, κατὰ παρθένον or παρθενικῶς probably help to show the gap between the heroes' appearance and their actual behaviour, as does Sosthenes at the end of the novel, when he reproachfully tells Hysmine she would have done better to act modestly rather than merely observe the proprieties, for 'it is not a silent tongue that defines chastity, but proper behaviour and a decent way of thinking' (*HH* 11.11.3). And it is certainly not by chance that in his dreams Hysminias twice appears to yearn for a world where lovers would be free to behave openly, bathe together, exchange kisses with everyone's knowledge and burst out laughing from pleasure, instead of enjoying themselves silently (*HH* 3.4.4–5; 5.1.3–4) – in short a world where one would be released from social constraints.

But these social constraints, so often alluded to in our Byzantine novels, were in fact less restricting in the reality of twelfth-century society than they appear to be in the imaginary world of Prodhomos, Eugenianos and Makrembolites. The limitations and incapacities the novelists impose on their heroines did not exist at the same level in contemporary practice, and far from being bound to seclusion, silence and submission, Byzantine women in reality enjoyed a relative freedom, had manifold rights and activities, especially in economic matters, and those belonging to the highest court aristocracy could even be actively involved in politics (Laiou 1981). Therefore Brigitte Egger's remarks about the Greek novels' conservatism and their being at variance with contemporary reality seem to apply to Byzantine romance as well. Egger (1994: 266 n.7, 271, 273–4, 279–80 n.54) explained the archaising trend of ancient novels as an expression of nostalgia, and she spoke of 'a consolation of gender', noting that in times of changing gender roles fantasies about the security of traditional gender identities tend to increase. The same strategy of gender construction may be at work in the Byzantine novels, at least in Prodhomos and, to a lesser degree, Eugenianos, for indeed twelfth-century society appears as a time of changing gender roles, and the way sexual differentiation is put to the fore in *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* may have had the comforting function alluded to by Egger.

In Komnenian society, the confinement of women to the gynaeceum had ceased to be a functional reality and had become a mere ideal (Laiou 1981:

³⁰ Cf. *HH* 3.5.7: 'At first she pretends (καθοποκρίνεται) not to listen to me'; 3.7.2: 'Pretending (ὕποπλαττομένη) to put her lips together, she bites my mouth amorously and conceals (ὕποκλέπτει) her kiss'; 5.16.1: 'She kissed me in return, but, as a virgin, she concealed (ὕπέκλεπται) her kisses out of shame.'

249; Garland, in this volume). Yet this ideal is constantly reasserted in every kind of narrative source. In spite of an obvious evolution of the female condition, historians and rhetors, as well as novelists, keep on using the same *topoi* about feminine weakness and remain faithful to the old standards that imposed on women a modest and retiring demeanour. This traditionalism is well shown by Anna Komnene's praise of her mother Irene Doukaina, whom she describes as a model of reserve and dignity, unwilling to make public appearances, to show her elbow or her eyes in front of everybody, or to let foreigners hear the sound of her voice.³¹ But she was not afraid of going on campaign with her husband and Anna takes much trouble to reconcile this with the social norm, insisting heavily on Irene's devotion to her husband to justify her presence among the army (*Alexiad* 12.3.6; *Leib* 3.61–2; Sewter 376; see also Smythe in this volume). The gap between ideology and practice was indeed very striking at Byzantium. As Lynda Garland notes (1988: 391), 'the Byzantine model for female deportment shows a total disregard for the underlying reality, provided that appearances were seen to be maintained'. Interestingly enough, Makrembolites' work can be read as an allusion to, and even a protest against, this gap between Byzantine norms and the actual way of living. The novelist often seems to deride the conventional, stereotyped character of the social code, to which one usually paid mere lip-service – and that is precisely what the heroes of the romance do in observing only the outward signs of modesty. Makrembolites' work thus appears as a literary play about 'double-think' – a feature that H.G. Beck (1986: 211–13) defines as one of the most intriguing of Byzantine society. It is worth noting that this text was the most widely read of the Komnenian novels (as shown by the manuscript tradition). The Byzantines apparently preferred its ironical questioning to the more comforting attitude adopted by a Prodrornos – a proof that, in spite of their often alleged superiority complex, they were not incapable of self-criticism and self-derision.

³¹ *Alexiad* 12.3.2–3 (*Leib* 3. 60): Irene is called 'the image of dignity, the temple of holiness ... a wonderful example of modesty'.

Street-life in Constantinople: Women and the Carnavalesque

Lynda Garland

An Introduction to Byzantine Humour

The existence of humour in Byzantium still appears surprising to the modern scholarly mind. Humour – a phenomenon which can include a variety of behaviour intended to produce smiles or laughter in an audience or readership – is the ultimate unorthodoxy, with its implications of mockery, lack of respect or restraint, reversal of roles, and evasion of social and/or political control. This is especially the case as so much Byzantine humour, like its classical predecessors, was based on mockery, abuse and humiliation – subjects like defecation, obscenity, physical violence, ritual humiliation, insults, and heavy sexual innuendo are rampant in the twelfth century, if not earlier (Garland 1990b, 1999b; Haldon 2002a, 2002b). To the Byzantines themselves, laughter was generally considered not only vulgar, but licentious and impious: just as Jesus, in the Gospel tradition, is never recorded as indulging in laughter, so saints, for example, are rarely if ever described as laughing – though they occasionally indulge in a smile which characterises their *apatheia*, their lack of concern with humanity's passions and desires. George of Amastris (d. 807), Loukas the Younger of Stiris (d. 953), and Paul of Latros (d. 955) abhorred jokes and laughter as children; Nikon 'ho Metanoecite' (d. 1000) checks all uncontrolled laughter in bystanders; and the *Life* of Theodore of Edessa (d. 856) categorises laughter and jests amongst sins to be avoided by a holy man.¹ Similarly the Greek

¹ George: V. Vasil'evskij (ed.), *Russko-vizantijskie issledovanija* (St. Petersburg, 1893) 2.1–73; Loukas: D. Z. Sophianos (ed.), *Ὁσιος Λουκᾶς, Ὁ βίος τοῦ ὁσίου Λουκᾶ τοῦ Στειριότου* (Athens, 1989); Paul: T. Wiegand (ed.), *Milet. 3.1. Der Latmos* (Berlin, 1913) 105–57; Nikon: D. Sullivan (ed.), *The Life of Saint Nikon* (Brookline, Mass., 1987); Theodore: I. Pomjalovskij (ed.), *Zhitie izhe vo sv. otca nashego Feodora archiepiskopa Edesskogo* (St. Petersburg, 1892). All these texts can be accessed through the *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database of the 8th to 10th Centuries*: <http://www.doaks.org/Hagio.html>.

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fathers, particularly Basil of Caesarea and John Chrysostom, condemned laughter (Adkin 1985), and from the time of Basil monks were specifically cautioned against the sin of laughing as a deliberate evasion of monastic *gravitas*.² In addition, where humorous incidents are recorded by historians or epistolographers, the narrative is invariably intended to point out the moral or political unsoundness of the participants and/or victim(s).

Although laughter was consistently condemned by the church fathers and regarded by the Byzantines as a sign of lewdness and obscenity (Kazhdan/Constable 1982a: 62), modern scholars, deluded by the Byzantines' public *persona*, still continue to ignore the existence of Byzantine humour. This is justified on the grounds that humour does not feature prominently in our sources, though with gems like the *Timarion*, *Ptochoprodromic poems*, *Journey of Mazaris* and the animal fables, to mention only a few, it is clear that humorous texts comprised a notable component of both learned and popular registers within Byzantine literature. In addition, the streets of the capital were – quite literally – a riotous place, in which bystanders of all classes interacted in the carnival medium.

Within the framework of a society which was undeniably patriarchal, women might be expected to be the group least allowed to laugh in the public domain. They were arguably a marginalised group, strictly controlled within a patriarchal framework, and if there was no seclusion *per se*, at least separation of the genders was ideologically considered a norm. In theory women, particularly those of respectable classes, were supposed to be seldom seen and never heard in public, and they were denied the power of giving instruction in church (Balsamon *PG*, 138.1017). Debate has long circled around the 'seclusion' of women in the ancient Greek world, over questions such as whether women were allowed to be present at fifth-century Athenian comedies:³ the safe answer is that there was no especial ban on their presence, but that 'respectable' women would have preferred to stay at home. The same is true of the women of Byzantium: their sphere was seen as being in the home and not in public. Furthermore, the problem is one of male-dominated sources, where both authorship and readership are almost exclusively male, and depictions of women, filtered through the perceptions and prejudices of male historians, may be biased both against

² Basil of Caesarea, 'Regulae fusius tractatae', *PG* 31.961; for laughter in the western monastic tradition, see I. M. Resnick, 'Risus monasticus: laughter and medieval monastic culture', *Revue bénédictine* 97 (1987), 90–100; for the tradition regarding Jesus, see J. le Goff, 'Jésus, a-t-il ri?' *L'histoire* 158 (1992), 72–4.

³ See, for example, D. Cohen, 'Seclusion, Separation, and the Status of Women in Classical Athens', *Greece and Rome*, 36 (1989), 3–15; A. J. Podlecki, 'Could Women Attend the Theater in Ancient Athens? A Collection of Testimonia', *Ancient World*, 21 (1990), 27–43.

individuals and against the gender itself. Indeed, the representation of women may be deliberately intended to bolster an existing hierarchy.

Consequently, women of all people should have been prevented from being present on the streets of Byzantine cities where they might participate in public displays of amusement. Yet it is clear that women had a constant presence on the Constantinopolitan streets. Some were clearly privileged enough to be able to stay at home and delegate activities outside the household to servants and retainers, but the majority of the female population – which could include anyone from housewives and small-scale retailers to prostitutes – maintained a ubiquitous presence on the streets of Constantinople as part of their daily routine. As such they had access to the city's festivals and carnivals, as well as the more macabre amusements of blindings and parades of infamy. As far as the sources permit us to make this deduction, women responded in the same way and to the same stimuli as male participants in the same street settings. Indeed, these 'invisible' women had opportunities for participating in or instigating amusement, which was – it must be admitted – often physical or brutal. As such, it reflects what medieval society found entertaining, rather than what twentieth-century susceptibilities regard as humorous.

The 'invisible' women of the capital

In general the sources provide most information about women of the imperial class, since they deserve mention in serious histories by reason of the fact that their birth and status overrides their gender. 'Working-class' women are disadvantaged on two counts – their gender and their low social status – and even the evidence for working-class occupations and entertainment has, of course, been filtered through the medium of educated authors. Nevertheless, working-class women were a constant feature of life in the streets of the capital, a fact which, though obvious, has often been under-appreciated.

What then of non-imperial women? Do we have any idea of the type of experiences to which lower-class women were exposed as part of the street life of Constantinople? One of the most valuable pieces of evidence comes from Michael Psellos, who exposes the darker side to Byzantine street entertainment, where blindings and lynchings are invariably accompanied by abuse, laughter, comic songs and dramatic parodies. Psellos tells us in his account of the riots, which led to the deposition of Michael V and the installation of Zoe and Theodora as joint rulers in April 1042, that upper-class women took to the streets in protest at Michael's treatment of Zoe – women who had never before left the *gynaikonitis*, or women's quarters:

and the women... I myself saw many women, whom nobody till then had seen outside the women's quarters, appearing in public and shouting and beating

their breasts and lamenting terribly at the empress's misfortune, but the rest were borne along like Maenads, and they formed no small band to oppose the offender....

Identifying with the empress personally in their apostrophe of Zoe as 'she who alone is beautiful, she who alone is free...', these women '...spoke and hurried together as though they intended to fire the palace (ὡς ἐμπρήσουσαι τὰ βασίλεια)' – the gender of the participle here making it quite clear that Psellos is describing the actions of the female participants in the riot. He continues, 'as there was no longer anything to stop them... they took up their positions for battle, at first in small groups, as if they were divided by companies. Later, with all the citizen army, they marched in one body to the attack' (Psellos 5.26; Renauld 1.102–3; Sewter 138–9). Slightly later, Psellos returns to the girls, who form part of the mob engaged in the destruction of the mansions of the emperor's family. Both young girls and children of either sex helped in the work of destruction, causing buildings to fall and carrying away the remains, with a total lack of concern (Psellos 5.29; R 1.104; S 140).

What is important here is the composition of the female members of the 'mob'. Psellos is not saying that it was unusual that women took part in a riot; his point is – and there is a clear reminiscence of Lysias's speech *Against Simon* here – that upper-class women were there too. In the circumstances of Zoe's deposition and enforced tonsure, there is no reason to doubt that upper-class 'segregated' women took part in the riot, as well as the lower-class women whom Psellos would have expected to see in the streets as a matter of course. If we need any suggestions as to who these might have been, the fourth Ptochoprodromic poem describes the narrator (in the persona of a penniless scholar) encountering both a baker's and butcher's wife in the course of their daily duties (104–8, 233–9), while in the streets 'good lady hand-workers' and middle-class housewives (χειρομάχισσες, καλοοικοδέσποινές μου) are summoned to view the wares or request the services of itinerant salesmen, who include tailors (90–6), pepper-grinders, fullers, cloth-sellers (114–29), and yoghurt-salesmen (109–13). The poorer classes in Constantinople lacked any real privacy: the narrator of this work can both see and hear through his wall the activities of the wife of the sieve-maker, who lives next door (130–4), and can smell the preparations for dinner made by a neighbouring cobbler's wife (61–7).⁴

Although seldom mentioned in our sources, prostitution was clearly a normal part of life in Constantinople. Psellos's own womenfolk encountered

⁴ With this one can compare the scenes of daily life given in John Tzetzes's letters (*Epistulae*, ed. P. A. M. Leone, Leipzig: Teubner, 1972), especially the situation of Tzetzes himself, living underneath a priest's family who kept pigs (and numerous children) in their apartment (no. 33).

and reformed a local prostitute, and according to Psellos, such women were numerous. When Michael IV set up his 'House of Repentance' to provide for such girls, with the intention of tempting them to virtue by providing them with sanctuary and a comfortable life, 'a great swarm descended upon this refuge'.⁵ The court of Andronikos Komnenos (r. 1183–85) and Isaac Angelos (r. 1185–95) also seems to have fostered a higher class of 'flute-girls' and 'concubines' who could be encountered in the palace late in the twelfth century (Choniates 275–6, 441–2). It can only be assumed that, like the prostitute who poured scalding water over Andronikos Komnenos (Choniates 350), such women formed a normal part of the 'underside' of Constantinopolitan street life.

Psellos's testimony informs us that women of all classes took an active part in the three-day riot against Michael V, and we should also assume that they participated in the rejoicing at the flight of Michael and his uncle the nobilissimos to the Stoudios monastery. This was marked by the 'common folk and the loungers in the market' (τὸ δ' ὅσον δημῶδες καὶ ἀγοραῖον) with dancing, dramatisations of the episode, and choral songs inspired by the events (Psellos 5.38; R 1.109; S 145). Presumably women also took part in the indecent verbal abuse hurled at the fugitives when they took refuge in the monastery. When Zoe asked the crowd what should be done with them, their response was: 'remove the miscreant, get rid of the offender: impale him, crucify him, blind him!' (Skylitzes, 420). The subsequent blinding of the emperor and his uncle was marked by the insults and mockery of the bystanders.⁶

A further note on women's presence in the city's streets involves Zoe herself, who on hearing of the imminent death of her second husband, Michael IV (r. 1034–41), went on foot through the streets in December 1041 to visit him at his monastery of the Holy Anargyroi (Psellos, 4.53; R 1.84; S 117). Psellos, of course, expresses shock because the empress actually walked, and went unaccompanied by her normal retinue. Nevertheless, the fact is that Zoe was not daunted by the prospect and was able to make the journey in safety, which suggests that the city streets were used to the presence of women and traversable in safety, even by those of imperial rank. Against this supposition is the fact that we are told St Mary the Younger (d. c. 903) stopped going to church every day when she moved from her small town to the city of Vizye because of the crowded nature of the streets and because she knew no one in the city (*AASS Nov.* 4.692–705, at 694). On the

⁵ Psellos, 'Εγκώμιον εἰς τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦς' (Sathas 1876: 5.26); *Chronographia* 4.36 (R 1.74–5; S 108); cf. Kekaumenos 1965: 54; Koukoules 1948: 2.117–62; Irmscher 1989.

⁶ Skylitzes 419–20; Psellos 5.38–9, 45–7, 50 (R 1.109–10, 112–5; S 144–5, 149, 151); Attaleiates 17; cf. Zonaras 612–3: τὸ δὲ πλῆθος συρρέεῦσαν περὶ αὐτοῦς, ἐνύβριζόν τε καὶ ἐπετῶθασον, καὶ μέλη συντιθέντες, ἐπετραγῶδον αὐτοῖς.

other hand her near-contemporary, the rather poorer Thomais of Lesbos, traversed the streets of Constantinople on a regular basis to do her shopping and worship at the city's churches (AASS *Nov.* 4.233–42). She is shown as moving freely among the streets, market-places and churches, and on one occasion, while on her way to church, she stripped off her garments to give them to a poor, naked man, and herself went naked through the streets 'for the sake of Christ'. In consequence, her husband, a 'man of wicked thoughts' and a humble sailor, flogged her (perhaps as much for the loss of the garments than the Lady Godiva act). Nevertheless, she 'adorned herself with wounds as with pearls, with hurts as with precious stones; she was embellished by thrashings as with golden coins... was adorned by insults as with expensive earrings; her beauty was enhanced by the beatings, and she was cheered by the mockeries' (AASS *Nov.* 4.233–42 at 236–7; Halsall 1996: 306, 308). Laiou 1989 notes the antithetical attitudes of the couple towards household expenditure.

Similarly when Anna Dalassene and her female relatives took sanctuary in St Sophia in 1081, she justified their early-morning arrival at the church by claiming that they were women from Anatolia who had been shopping in the capital and who wanted to worship before departing for home (Anna Komnene 2.5.3–7; Leib 1.76–8; Sewter 83–6). Ordinary housewives are also shown in the streets in the unusual life of Leo of Catania (d. 780), written before the tenth century (Latyser 1914: esp. 13, 15, 26–8), which focuses primarily on the life's anti-hero, the sorcerer Heliodoros who had sold his soul to the devil. One of Heliodoros's first displays of power was his magical creation in the street of the illusion of a flowing river. Women who were passing by pulled their tunics up to their thighs, under the impression that they were walking through deep water, thus incurring public shame and mockery, and giving rise to uproarious laughter from Heliodoros's companions. When taken to Constantinople by Herakleides to stand charges, he found another female victim: after Herakleides's wife the stratorissa Aithalia had mocked and spat at him, he exposed her to the insult and derision of the whole city (εἰς κοινὴν ὕβριν καὶ καταγέλωτα) by putting out all the fires throughout the capital – the only fire that could, we are told, be found anywhere proceeded from her 'womb', i.e., her vagina. The author refuses to recount the details of the shameful treatment perpetrated on her by the crowd under the excuse of their need for fire. Whatever credence is given to this account, while some women may have chosen to stay at home, many clearly went out or had duties and lifestyles that obliged them to traverse the streets of the capital.

‘Parades of infamy’

As well as participating in the more spontaneous occasions of riots and blindings as part of their normal presence on the streets, women could be spectators of official parades, which were considered – by the Byzantines – to be a source of public entertainment, if in a rather macabre way. Imperial women could also be present, under appropriate circumstances. Anna Komnene, daughter of Alexios I Komnenos, was, with her sisters, able to watch from the palace the *diapompeusis* (parade of infamy) of the rebel Michael Anemas and his conspirators in 1105. Such *diapompeuseis* were a popular spectacle for people of all ages, in which rebels and unsuccessful rivals for the throne were ritually humiliated in public. Anna’s own reaction (as recorded in the *Alexiad*) was one of pity and discomfort for the victims, but the spectators in general saw such spectacles as highly amusing. As was customary in such parades, the prisoners were dressed in sackcloth, had their heads and beards shaved, were crowned with animal entrails and horns (depicting crowns), and made to ride sideways on oxen to the accompaniment of a comic song with a refrain (*Alexiad* 12.6.5; L 3.72–3; S 385). There is unfortunately a lacuna in the song, which summoned everyone to come and see the ‘horn-wearing’ rebels who had raised their swords against the emperor. The term used of the orchestrators of this entertainment is ‘οἱ σκηνιστοί’, perhaps best translated as ‘stage-managers’. Significantly, Anna, like the non-imperial women present, heard or was told of the comic song, and she is obviously well aware of the humorous propensities of the people of Constantinople, even if she chooses generally not to repeat their comments in her history. In her view they enjoyed expressions of mockery and invective, but she herself is generally slow to take note of them (*Alexiad* 3.1.4; L 104–5; S 104). Yet, when popular ditties – on Alexios’s successful flight from the city prior to his coup and his defeat of the Pechenegs – reflect well on her father, she is prepared to give them verbatim, even where necessary appending an interpretation for the too-literate reader.⁷ But she says she is unable, as a woman and a princess, to give the details of Pope Gregory’s treatment of the envoys of Henry IV or the Bogomil heresy (*Alexiad* 1.13.3; L 1.48, S 62; 15.9.1; L 3.223, S 499–500). Anna is thus fully aware of and prepared to repeat popular comments when they reflect favourably on her father, while leaving the reader to speculate on the language and expressions of those that were critical or abusive. In this way she gives the impression that the court was well aware of what was said or sung in the streets of the capital, in the form of popular songs, lampoons, or via other methods of ‘publication’.

⁷ *Alexiad* 2.4.9 (L 1.75; S 82): ἁσμάτιον; 8.5.8 (L 2.143, S 258): παρῳδιόν τι; for the development of vernacular satirical songs, see Jeffreys 1974: esp. 176–95.

Other instances of imperial women being present as spectators at parades of infamy include the empresses Zoe and Theodora, when Constantine IX triumphed over the rebel general George Maniakes (McCormick 1986: 204). Although it was unusual for empresses to attend triumphs, here Zoe and Theodora were doubtless present in their official capacities as empresses in their own right, seated, as they were, one on either side of the emperor at the Chalke church. They thus witnessed the humiliating treatment of the representatives of the rebel army, who had their heads shaven in disgrace and were seated backward on asses, their necks draped with dung and other refuse, while the rebel general's head was displayed to everyone, attached to a post on the top of the hippodrome. Constantine was directly responsible for the organisation of the parade in all its details, which he must have considered acceptable to the aged empresses (Psellos 6.87–8 (R 2.6–7; S 198–9); cf. Skylitzes 428; McCormick 1986: 181; Koukoules 1949). Previously, in 1043, Constantine had celebrated a triumph after the defeat of the rebel Theophilos Erotikos, strategos of Cyprus, in which the rebel had been paraded through the hippodrome dressed in women's costume (Skylitzes 429). The fact that such ritual humiliation replaced capital punishment shows the extent to which this public mockery struck at the aristocracy's inherent dignity and sense of identity.

On such occasions women, and it seems women of all ranks, could take an active role, as they did at the *diapompeusis* and lynching of Andronikos I Komnenos in the hippodrome in 1185. First, when the ex-emperor was paraded before his successor Isaac Angelos, women, presumably widows of the many officials killed by Andronikos, helped to punch him in the face. Later he was led into the hippodrome on the hump of a camel in mock triumph before a crowd of amused onlookers, and he was struck on the head with clubs, befouled with dung, stabbed and stoned. That women joined in can be seen from the prostitute (μία δέ τις πορνική γυνή καὶ ἀκόλαστος) who grabbed a earthenware pot of hot water from a street kitchen and emptied it over Andronikos's head (Choniates 350) – 'deadlier than the male' indeed.

There is also evidence for 'mock' parades of infamy, when the victim was out of popular reach, which were orchestrated by the city population themselves rather than staged by the emperor as official ritual humiliation of a defeated rival. A popular satirical song targeting the empress Theophano, after her murder of Nikephoros II Phokas in 969, mocks her ambition, promiscuity, and blighted hopes at not marrying her lover, John Tzimiskes, and thus becoming empress for the third time. Supposedly the daughter of a Constantinopolitan inn-keeper of lower class birth, it was rumoured that she had also poisoned her first husband, Romanos II, and her father-in-law, Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (Skylitzes 246–7; Leo the Deacon 31).

At the instigation of the patriarch Polyeuktos, Tzimiskes, instead of marrying her, exiled her first to Prinkipo, and then after she had attempted a comeback by escaping and taking refuge in St Sophia to a remote monastery in the far reaches of the empire – Damideia in the Armeniac theme. The song appears to have been part of a mock *diapompeusis*, after Theophano had been sent into exile, in which an actress would have played the part of the ex-empress either in the hippodrome or in the streets of the city. It also takes a side-swipe at the patriarch Polyeuktos and the chamberlain Basil, both eunuchs, for their part in the accession of John Tzimiskes and the exile of Theophano:

‘The blacksmith strikes his anvil, and he strikes his neighbours too’:
 (for) the matchmaker and the princeling are standing at the door.
 Theophano wanted her cake (pie) and the beauty ate it.
 He who wore the coronation robe now donned a leather hide,
 and if wintry weather comes upon him, he will wear his fur coat too;
 (for) men with shrivelled cocks and hand-size arseholes
 parade the murdering adulteress on the saddle of a mule.
 (Morgan 1954; trans. Horrocks 1997: 259–60)

While seriously corrupted in some places, this song in a late sixteenth-century Cretan manuscript starts by citing a well-known proverb, along the lines of ‘bad company brings bad consequences’. The princeling is of course the new emperor Tzimiskes, and the ‘matchmaker’ is the chamberlain Basil ‘the parakoimomenos’, who, following Theophano’s disappointment, arranged Tzimiskes’s marriage to the middle-aged princess Theodora, the ‘beauty’ of line 3 (‘more wise than beautiful’ is the comment of Leo the Deacon: 127). This legitimised the new emperor by a connection to the Macedonian dynasty. The terms used for the pair – *πρωΐδης* and *συνάπτης* – may well be a play on the words for a bitter herb and mustard, and Tzimiskes has clearly developed a thick skin, which will continue to get thicker in the future should the going continue to get tough. A dig at the sexual proclivities of the patriarch and chamberlain (a monk and eunuch), who engineered Theophano’s downfall, ends the ditty. This song presumably dates to the wedding of Tzimiskes and Theodora in November 970, and is an entertaining example of role reversal in its public mockery of the disappointed hopes of the empress.

Street ‘theatre’ and carnival

Without dispute, women would have been spectators of and participants in the normal street festivals and shows mentioned by the canonists John Zonaras and Theodore Balsamon in their scholia to canons 51 and 62 of the Council in Trullo (AD 692), which banned mimes and pantomimes and pagan observances (such as pagan festivals like the Kalends, Vota and

Brumalia, the dancing of women, cross-dressing and the wearing of comic, tragic or satiric masks). The fact that such practices were prohibited by the Patriarch Luke Chrysoverges strongly suggests that they were still current in the period 1157–70, while Kekaumenos refers to μίμοι and παιγνιῶται, presumably professional actors or mummers, on several occasions, and considers them the preserve of the πολιτικοί, or common people of the streets.⁸ These carnivalesque occasions appear to have included various rough and tumble mimic shows and farcical masquerades, including the public dancing of women and cross-dressing by both sexes, women as men and men as women, while laymen could act the part of monks or clerics, and clerics those of soldiers and animals. Participants might also imitate Arabs, Armenians and slaves, and ‘who by hitting one another on the head and making loud noises, cause indecorous laughter and who, as it were, incite the more simple-minded and heedless to Bacchic frenzy’ (Zonaras, *PG* 137.693BC). According to Balsamon (*PG* 137.729A–31A), it was also not unusual, though of course against canon law, for clergy on particular festival days to dress up as soldiers, entering church in costume complete with swords, or as monks or four-legged animals. Choirmasters, too, would click their fingers like charioteers, wear beards of seaweed (apparently) and imitate female occupations. Balsamon is especially concerned (728B) as such practices were only relatively recently instituted in Saint Sophia at Christmas and Epiphany, by the patriarch Theophylact, the son of Romanos I Lekapenos, in the tenth century. According to Skylitzes, who is Balsamon’s source, Theophylact had introduced ‘satanic dances, unintelligible cries, and songs collected from cross-roads and brothels’ (Skylitzes 243–4). Indeed, Balsamon comments, respectable women had to stay away from church on some saints’ days, to avoid contact in the streets with carnival merry-makers (*PG* 138.245D–8B). This possibly explains St Mary the Younger’s reluctance to go to church every day when she moved to the city of Vizye, ‘the change being due... since she was in a populous city, to a reluctance to come into the sight of one and all, native and foreign’ (*AASS Nov.* 4.692–705, at 694; Laiou 1996: 260).

Whether inadvertently or deliberately, women could hardly have been excluded as spectators and participants from such public spectacles of slapstick and buffoonery, and specific evidence that women were in the streets and as willing to poke fun at suitable objects of amusement as their menfolk is supplied by Choniates. At Rhaidestos in Thrace in 1195, at the

⁸ Ralles and Potles 2.425–6, 448–52; Grumel 1989: 1093; Kekaumenos 1965: 8.31, 20.19, 49.19; Mango 1981a: esp. 350. For a recent study of Balsamon’s canon law, see C. Gallagher, *Church Law and Church Order in Rome and Byzantium: a Comparative Study*, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs 8 (London: Ashgate, 2002), 153–86. For carnival festivities and jokes in general, see Koukoules 3.284–311.

time of the visit of Isaac II Angelos, women were reported as consulting the false prophet Basilakios who, accompanied by female disciples and relatives ('mad with passion and inebriated'), inspected women's breasts and ankles before foretelling the future. Some of the women who consulted him had delight in making fun of him, and 'asked indecent questions and wore immodest frocks to make sport of him', though others considered him to be either a buffoon or a true prophet of the future (Choniates 448–9; Magoulias 246). Basilakios appears to have been a local phenomenon, but the women of Constantinople doubtless possessed much the same freedom of movement and opportunities to exercise their satirical tendencies as their counterparts in Rhaidestos (and indeed, in western Europe: Brown 2003).

Bakhtin's theory of carnival, that laughter was the primary feature of medieval and renaissance popular culture (as opposed to the *agelastoi* within the church establishment: Bakhtin 1968: 1–24), can here be applied within Byzantium. Certainly the church, at least that part of it represented by the canonists, disapproved of such manifestations of carnival, perhaps because they were openly endorsed by the majority of clergy on festival occasions, even in St Sophia itself. This overturning of reality and inversion of the social and religious order shows Byzantine carnival creating a topsy-turvy world where behavioural norms are stood on their head, and the fact that such comedy was enacted during festivals, both on a regular, annual basis, such as saints' days, and on more irregular ones, such as imperial festivities, gave the populace a chance to flout convention in a ritual reversal of social norms.

Guild-related festivities

Public festivities did not have to be city-wide: the eleventh-century poet Christopher of Mitylene refers to a procession through the streets and forum held by student notaries and their teachers in the capital on the feast of the Holy Notaries (25 October), in which the students dressed up in disguise, some in the clothing of women or members of the imperial family, while wearing masks and engaging in some form of acting or miming (Kurtz 1903: no. 137). Balsamon mentions this festival specifically in his scholion to canon 62 of the Council in Trullo as one that was only recently abolished by the patriarch Chrysoverges (*PG* 137.732A).

What is lacking is evidence for this type of 'all-women' entertainment at street-level, unless one can count the 'festival of Agathe', a festival which took place in the capital on May 12 for female spinners, weavers and woolcarders, perhaps a female guild, or a voluntary workers' association (Laiou 1986; cf. Maniates 2001). Described by Michael Psellos alongside his pieces in praise of the flea, louse and bedbug (Sathas 1872: 5.527–31), the festival involved the participation of priests, while the women made

offerings to icons, presumably in church, and sang songs or hymns, some of considerable antiquity, others improvised. The fact that Psellos mentions the women's entry into church as being orderly (ἐν κόσμῳ καὶ τάξει) suggests that festivities degenerated into frivolity, and indeed Psellos appears to consider the whole festival a trivial subject. Later in the proceedings, at a different location, activities were presided over by older women, the experts in cloth-making and προμνήστριαι of the festival, who led the dancing and singing. From the text it appears that depictions of cloth-making were represented in wall-paintings on which women were shown carding and weaving, these depictions being explained to the others (perhaps apprentices) by the supervisors. In some of these, women who were unskilled in the task were shown as being punished. The ceremony ended with a rhythmical song accompanying a dance, in which the women held hands.

These women appear to have been professional cloth producers, celebrating their feast day: professional women silk workers are evidenced in Constantinople in the tenth century in the *Book of the Eparch* (7.2), and at Thebes and Corinth in the early twelfth. Many of these provincial workers of high quality textiles were carried off to Sicily by the Normans when they sacked Thebes in 1147 (Brand 1993; Choniates 74, 98). It is even possible (Laiou 1986: 113) that, rather than the punishment of inept workers being depicted in a wall-fresco, the women participated in some sort of mime (εἰκὼν, σχῆμα). If this is the case, we may have evidence for a mimic show by professional female workers in a humorous depiction of 'how not to do it' for the benefit of their junior members. In any case, it would be wise to consider that some form of carnivalesque entertainment and jesting took place, as in the case of the student notaries' annual festival.

Private entertainment

If we need information about the presence of non-imperial women at private entertainments, we can look at the middle-class world of the twelfth-century learned romances, written by four of the greatest scholars of the day. In these there are two descriptions of entertainments at which women, including unmarried girls, are present (see Jouanno in this volume). In Prodromos's work *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* (2.115–19; Conca 96), Dosikles recounts to his friend Kleander, how Rhodanthe and he had been present at a party in a merchant's house in the town of Rhodes at which Nausikrates, one of the guests, more than a little inebriated, performed a rustic sailor's dance to comic effect (2.115–19). The lovers, especially Dosikles, have other things on their minds apart from the entertainment, and do not appear to have appreciated the entertainment particularly. Significantly, on arriving at the house, Rhodanthe describes herself as ashamed at being seen by and

dining with unknown men, but Dosikles assures her that their hostess Myrtipnoe has specifically invited her in and that therefore the invitation must be accepted; Myrtipnoe's unmarried daughter also dines with the guests (2.69–82, 101–2).

In Eugenianos's *Drosilla and Charikles* the lovers, after being enslaved at the Parthian court and then carried off by Arabs, are reunited in the house of an old village woman, Baryllis, after Drosilla has escaped from the attentions of the innkeeper's son. At a dinner party given by Baryllis (7.272–93; Conca 460) their hostess (who describes herself as a γράυς and πρεσβῦτις: 7.250), overcome with joy at the sight of the young lovers' reunion, attempts to execute a Bacchic dance with table napkins on the table. In her convolutions, this comic adaptation of Theokritos's 'sweet Amaryllis' trips over her own feet, landing upside down on her head in the dust to the accompaniment of three loud farts, which greatly amuses her guests (7.287). Their laughter is unrestrained, despite the fact that she is a cheerful and generous host: Kratander, the couple's friend, is so overwhelmed with amusement that he is unable to help the poor woman up but falls on his back 'half-dead' with laughter and snorting heavily (7.294–6). Even Charikles has to smile, though concentrating on kissing Drosilla at the time (Beaton 1989: 75; Giusti 1993). Baryllis tells the young couple that she had not laughed or danced since her son Chramos died seven years ago, and they assure her that they enjoyed both her hospitality and her performance (7.271–329). Clearly there is no segregation of the sexes here at these rather riotous twelfth-century 'lower-class' dinner parties, where unmarried girls and their partners can enjoy the antics of drunken fellow-diners, unless their attention is otherwise engaged. Whether such parties would have been replicated in the capital in real life is, of course, another matter.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that it is generally assumed that the streets of Constantinople and other Byzantine cities were primarily populated with men, this is clearly not the case. A variety of women of all ranks of life could be encountered around the streets as part of their normal occupations – saleswomen, inn-keepers, shoppers, prostitutes, church-goers, and travellers. We must bear in mind throughout that, even when women are not specifically mentioned as part of the 'mob', the Constantinopolitan crowd was not gendered exclusively male: women thronged the streets as part of their daily business, happy to take part in activities which included riots and blindings, guild activities, parades of infamy, religious festivities, and masquerades and street carnival. When on the streets, they freely participated in whatever spectacles were at hand – ranging from mockery and singing comic songs to looting the houses of imperial figures who had

fallen from favour – and there were plentiful opportunities to be so engaged. Clearly many women had the freedom to take part in city life, particularly street carnival: the women of the city were also ready to mock, insult and laugh at the grotesque or ridiculous, while, like men, they enjoyed obscenity, crudity, and personal abusive attack both as spectators and as participants. In fact, despite the rigid social rules regarding women, or doubtless because of them, women freely responded to humour in much the same way as their male counterparts.

Imperial Women and Entertainment at the Middle Byzantine Court

Lynda Garland

If any women in Byzantium had the freedom to select their own forms of entertainment and amusement, clearly it would have been women of the imperial family. Through a study of court entertainment and the degree to which women were permitted to be present as audience, we should expect to be able to ascertain the types of humour accessible to and appreciated by women at court. Certainly, under the *aegis* of numerous emperors such as Constantine Monomachos (r. 1042–1055) and Isaac Angelos (r. 1185–1195), the imperial court was a hotbed of buffoonery and licentiousness (Garland 1995/6), and women of the imperial family are shown on many occasions as responding positively to the slapstick and jesting which was to be encountered as a matter of course in the imperial palace. And while historians may be recording these anecdotes to ridicule and undermine the dignity and propriety of a certain ruler or his administration, it must be assumed that the audience reaction to specific incidents appeared psychologically credible to the readership.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the entertainment available to or enjoyed by imperial women, it is necessary first to clarify the extent to which women would have been part of the audience being publicly or privately entertained in the imperial palace. It has been widely accepted that there was segregation of the genders at court, at least before the period of the Komnenoi (r. 1081–1185), and that it was customary for the genders to be separated for ceremonial purposes such as receptions and banquets. Kazhdan and McCormick (1997: 182–3), for example, discuss the ‘general tendency of Byzantium’s upper classes toward sexual segregation’. Certainly there was the empress’s own court (τὸ σέκρετον τῶν γυναικῶν; Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *de cer.* 1.49(40)) where empresses presided over their own ceremonial sphere populated by wives of officials of the state hierarchy – these women being granted court titles corresponding to those of their

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husbands, such as magistrissai, patrikiai, protospathariai and kandidatissai — whose public lives revolved around that of the empress. The need for an empress to oversee court ceremonial for women was generally accepted, and even validated Leo VI's third marriage to Eudokia Baiane in 900 (Nicholas 1973: *Ep.* 32.77–84), while the courtiers of Michael II supposedly demanded his remarriage on the grounds that their wives needed 'a mistress and an empress' (Theophanes Continuatus 78 (2.24)). The empress also possessed her own private quarters and retinue, though it is important not to overstate the degree of privacy: we should not assume that the *gynaikonitis* (the women's quarters of the palace), particularly under the Komnenoi, was segregated so much as separate (Garland 1988). And clearly, under the Komnenoi, males and females at court shared the same space for at least some of the time. In the time of Constantine Porphyrogennetos, the most eminent patrician woman (the *zoste patrikia*) ranked fourth in honour in the seating at imperial banquets, even if other women are notably absent from the guest lists for imperial banquets in the ninth and tenth centuries. However, given a possible total of some 1,600 male courtiers at the end of the ninth century (Kazhdan & McCormick 1997: 176), we then have to postulate the existence of a proportionate number of 'socially invisible' wives, who would have maintained a presence at specific imperial functions centred around the empress. Empresses were, of course, generally far more visible than other women within the court hierarchy and, by the end of the period, it was even possible for an empress-consort to transcend gender boundaries: Euphrosyne, the wife of Alexios III (r. 1195–1203), was considered by Choniates to take things too far in holding her own court, at which not merely the wives of dignitaries, but all the dignitaries themselves had to pay her homage (Choniates 460: cf. 456–7).

Jesters as a professional elite

The pinnacle of the mimic profession was to become a court jester, or mime. Within the Byzantine court, and presumably, it could be postulated, in wealthy households too, mimes were the focus of orchestrated humour, expected or obliged to make fun of all at court, not even excepting the emperor and members of the imperial family.¹ This highly-structured role of jester consisted of verbal humour, including teasing, jests, insult, ridicule, and obscenity and non-verbal humour such as slapstick and horseplay in the presence of an audience. As in the streets of the city, Byzantium's elite also

¹ See, for example, for medieval Europe, S. Billington, *A Social History of the Fool* (Brighton and New York, 1984); E. Welsford, *The Fool* (London, 1935), esp. 8–19 for the fame of certain professionals.

enjoyed the insults and slapstick inherent in carnival culture, and had permanent professionals to cater for their tastes.

The prominence of court mimes is shown by the fact that many of them are specifically mentioned by name: Grylos ('hog') was the favourite jester of Michael III, and (according to an anti-Amorian source) impersonated the patriarch; when Michael summoned his mother to meet the 'patriarch' he then turned round and farted in her face (Theophanes Continuatus 201–2). There appears at the court of Leo VI to have been a mimic hierarchy: when Zaoutzes, father of Leo's mistress Zoe, wanted to prevent Euthymios from being appointed patriarch he attempted to suborn Titlivakios, 'the first (πρώτιστος) of the mimes' (σκηνικοί) who were going into the royal dinner as usual, to insult him; when Titlivakios refused, Zaoutzes engaged the service of Lampoudios (*Vita S. Euthymii*, 48–50). Lampoudios performed the task, in his enthusiasm making all the diners blush at his insults, but got thrown out of the dining-room and died miserably later that evening. In the later twelfth century, Chalivoures was 'the wittiest' of Isaac Angelos's mimes (Choniates 441), implying the simultaneous existence of quite a number of such professionals.

From the above episodes jesters appear to have specialised in abusive attacks and puns, but no doubt their repertoire included the whole range of verbal or non-verbal humour. It is tempting to wonder in what ways their jests related to the 265 jokes contained in the popular jest-book, the *Philogelos*, which appears in many manuscripts of the tenth and eleventh centuries, though composed at a much earlier date. Possibly written for the lower urban classes, the jokes focus on such stock subjects as scholastikoi ('egg-heads'), doctors, misers, and people from Abdera and Kyme (Thierfelder 1968). Few of its jokes concern women (cf. 244, 248), but many have sexual overtones. The fact that numerous copies were available testifies to the jokes' popularity with a literate readership, and may give us a clue to the stock jests of the period, though the hallmark of a professional wit is the ability to invent and improvise according to circumstances, along the lines of similar puns, paradoxes and ridiculous misunderstandings. Inasmuch as jest-books imply social groups, the *Philogelos* is, at least, the nearest equivalent to 'mass-market' humour that we possess.

From numerous references to mimes and their abusive and caustic humour it is clear they were a feature of court life throughout the entire period A.D. 800–1200, especially at the emperor's dinner table (Garland 1990). But we have almost no evidence for any specific entertainments which were thought proper for the empress and her women in the ninth to the eleventh centuries, or the extent to which the separate court of the empress (or her private parties) was amused by the activities of the court jesters. It must, however, be remembered that the empress and her ladies

were not 'secluded' as such within the *gynaikonitis* (the women's quarters of the palace): indeed the *gynaikonitis* was readily accessible to any invitees. But it was private in the sense that (unless confined there for political reasons, as Zoe was under Michael IV and Michael V) the empress was free to choose her own visitors, such as ministers, relatives, courtiers – and entertainers. Theophano, after all, when tired of her austere second husband Nikephoros II Phokas, was able successfully to hide away a band of assassins within her chambers (Leo the Deacon 85, though Skylitzes 279 reduces the number to a single conspirator). When, therefore, we are told that in the early ninth-century the court jester Denderis saw the Empress Theodora, wife of Theophilos, admiring an icon in her bedroom and got her into trouble with her iconoclast husband by reporting the fact, we may assume that jesters could be permitted to have the run of the empress's private apartments and that they exercised their talents there – provided that did not transgress certain parameters. On this occasion Theodora avoided the charge by pretending she had been looking in a mirror and had Denderis severely chastised for telling tales (Theophanes Continuatus 91–2; (Pseudo-) Symeon 629–30; Skylitzes 53). Whatever the possible bias of the Macedonian sources, the fact that the jester was reportedly there implies that he was normally welcome (though not on this occasion), in which case the humour of the court mimes was equally appreciated by the whole court, regardless of gender.

As, during the twelfth century, court ceremonies become less gender-specific women were present at certain imperial audiences as well as at the regular dinner-table in the palace. Mary of Antioch was present, for example, at an imperial audience at which the interpreter, Aaron Isaakios of Corinth, advised envoys from the west, in their own language, not to accede too quickly to the emperor's demands. Mary later revealed this to Manuel and Aaron was suitably punished by blinding (Choniates 146–7). If this was the case, imperial women would certainly have been present on less official occasions and would have interacted in public with jesters, either as target or as audience. Choniates, for example, himself *logothetes ton sekreton* late in the reign, makes clear that under the Angeloi (r. 1185–1203) women were present at the court dinner entertainments, which naturally included jesters. At this time the court was noted for its licentious and immoral conduct, which included amusements such as an effeminate concern with hairstyles, dress and perfumery, baths, a love of music and dancing, ribaldry, buffoonery with entertainers such as dwarfs, and country excursions, banquets and drinking parties (Choniates 384, 388–9, 441–2, 529, 540–1 508–9, 530). Licentiousness, we must note, if taken *au pied de la lettre* implies the presence of women, and in fact it was the presence of Isaac II's concubines and female relatives at dinner that allowed the mime

Chalivoures to make the following pun on words, so often quoted as a typical Byzantine joke:

As he [Isaac II Angelos] delighted in ribaldries and lewd songs and consorted with laughter-stirring dwarfs, he did not close the palace to knaves, mimes, and minstrels. But arm and arm with these must come drunken revel, followed by sexual wantonness and all else that corrupts the healthy and sound state of the empire. Once at dinner Isaac said, 'Bring me salt [*halas*]'. Standing nearby admiring the dance of the women made up of the emperor's concubines and kinswomen was Chalivoures, the wittiest of the mimes, who retorted, 'Let us first come to know these, O Emperor, and then command *others* [*allas*] to be brought in'. At this, everyone, both men and women, burst into loud laughter; the emperor's face darkened and only when he had chastened the jester's freedom of speech was his anger curbed. (Choniates 441–2; Magoulas 242)

The joke may not be a brilliant one, but it does make clear the fact that imperial women, such as the emperor's female relatives (including presumably Isaac's second wife, Margaret, daughter of Béla III), and ladies of the *demi-monde* were present at the emperor's dinner-table and its associated entertainment. Indeed, they were clearly prepared to laugh at jokes, even if these annoyed the emperor: after all the joke – the sexual innuendo – was on them. Obviously imperial women were no longer 'segregated', if they ever had been, from imperial parties which could include 'drunken revel' and 'sexual wantonness' and all the activities of knaves, mimes, minstrels and 'laughter-stirring dwarfs'. Indeed, like Alexios I, Isaac Angelos actually took his 'gynaikonitis', the women of his court, on campaign against the Vlachs and Cumans (Choniates 434). Alexios's wife Irene had been the subject of lampoons for going on campaign with her husband, supposedly to protect him against personal threats, but more probably because Alexios did not choose to leave her on the loose in Constantinople without him (see also Smythe in this volume). We are told by their daughter Anna, that attempts were made by conspirators, who wished to assassinate the emperor, to drive Irene back to the capital by throwing scurrilous written lampoons (*famosa*) into the emperor's tent, attacking her for accompanying her husband and the army. One of these writings was actually found under the emperor's bed. According to Anna, they had to be burnt and the writers severely punished (*Alexiad* 13.1.6; Leib 3.89; Sewter 397). While it may have caused comment, it was not unknown, from the early twelfth century, for the women of the court to go on campaign, and in the reign of Manuel we have Manuel's widowed niece, Eudokia, sharing a tent with his cousin Andronikos Komnenos when the court was at Pelagonia. The situation incensed Eudokia's relatives and they attempted to assassinate Andronikos, who escaped by cutting through the side of the tent. It is not entirely clear why the court was at Pelagonia,

perhaps for some recreational hunting, but that women were present in some comfort is shown by the fact that Eudokia had her chambermaids and maidservants (προκοίτων καὶ κατευναστριῶν γυναικῶν) with her (Choniates 104–5): it was not simply a one-on-one romantic assignation. By the time of the later Komnenoi and Angeloi, imperial women seem to have been present at all functions involving the court, including all its associated entertainment.

Within the gynaikonitis

In theory women, particularly those of respectable classes, were supposed to be seldom seen and never heard in public, and the separation of genders was considered the norm ideologically. That in itself suggests that within the parameters of their own quarters, women would traditionally have had their own gendered humour through which they would have affirmed their own identity and mocked the representatives of the patriarchal society in which they lived.

The only specific record of empresses' appreciation of humour in their private quarters is the description by the minister Michael Psellos of the comic turn put on, c. 1049/50, for the elderly sisters and co-empresses Zoe and Theodora, the last of the Macedonian house. Psellos's account is, of course, intended to ridicule the courtier Romanos Boilas (who was not in fact a professional jester but an aristocrat). It may also have been aimed at the empresses and their frivolous, apolitical way of life, which he elsewhere criticises, but there is nothing to suggest that he is inventing the incident. The court of Zoe's third husband, Constantine IX Monomachos, was a jolly place. Constantine, who was not above inventing his own practical jokes,² 'lived for pleasure alone', and was particularly fond of Romanos Boilas, who – according to Psellos – entertained Constantine in a number of foolish ways, such as nonsense talk, fabricated speech impediments, jokes against Constantine himself, and general foolery. Psellos, by his own account, appears to have endured some excruciating moments at court as a result of Boilas's antics during which Psellos (and presumably the rest of the court too) 'were forced to laugh at things which should have made us weep' (Psellos *Chronographia* 6.138–9, 143; R 2.37–40; S 228–31). Elsewhere Constantine is said to have been always ready to smile and to have conferred honours on those who amused him by their witticisms (*Chronographia* 6.29, 33; R 1.132, 133–4; cf. Attaleiates 47; Zonaras 3.617). Indeed, in the context of Boilas's tricking Constantine out of the gift of a fine horse with the aid of an elderly eunuch, Psellos informs the reader that 'if I had not promised to

² For example, Psellos *Chronographia* 6.201; Renault 2.70; Sewter 259. (Hereafter abbreviated to R and S respectively.)

write on serious matters, and if I cared to record foolish trifles, my history could be augmented with a vast collection of such anecdotes' (*Chronographia* 6.143; R 2.40; S 231). The modern scholar can only regret this lost goldmine. Psellos has a personal and political agenda here in his dislike of Boilas, whom he considers unsound, and who later was involved in a plot against the emperor: he delights to portray him as a 'clown', rather than as the aristocrat and dangerous conspirator that he undoubtedly was.

Accordingly, when Psellos relates the amusement provided by Boilas in the *gynaikonitis*, the point-of-attack of the narrative is primarily directed at Boilas himself and his inappropriate adoption of a jester's role, rather than at the empresses and their choice of entertainment – though we would be naïve not to expect some bias from Psellos against empresses who had earlier 'confused the trifles of the women's quarters with important matters of state' (*Chronographia* 6.5; R 1.119; S 157). But, significantly, Psellos is here not describing one of the vast collection of foolish trifles and anecdotes, which would have made his history even more entertaining, but in fact relating his 'narrative of events'.

In this unusual vignette, Psellos describes Boilas within the *gynaikonitis*, entertaining the elderly empresses in what Psellos sees as a vulgar and quite inappropriate manner: he pretended, for example, that Zoe, who at this point was some 70 or 71 years of age, was his mother, and described 'with shameless details' her labour in bringing him into the world. Similarly he re-enacted a supposed childbirth by the younger of the two sisters, Theodora. Significantly, Psellos's account stresses the tremendous success of this performance and the numerous privileges, including unlimited access to the women's quarters, that were showered on Boilas as a result of this and other performances:

Well, this clown of ours not only took possession of the men's apartments in the palace, but having wormed his way into the imperial *gynaikonitis* as well, he won the favour of both empresses. Indulging in all kinds of silly talk (τὸν λῆρον πάντα πλάσάμενος), he maintained he had been born of the elder sister [Zoe]. Further than that, he swore most solemnly that the younger sister [Theodora], too, had given birth to a child. His own birth, he said, had taken place thus – and then, as if recalling how he had been brought into the world, he gave a description of her labour, with shameless details. His most witty anecdotes, however, concerned Theodora's accouchement, the conversations she had (with him) during the pregnancy, and the manner of her delivery. These foolish women, captivated by the clown's stories, allowed him to come and go as he pleased by secret doors. It would not, indeed, be easy to enumerate all the privileges that were showered on him, both in the men's and women's apartments in the palace (*Chronographia* 6.144; R 2.40–1; S 231).

Psellos actually seems to find the scene funny – inappropriate in an imperial setting, naturally, but his description of the anecdotes as 'witty'

(ἀστειότατα) implies that this sort of play-acting did have its appeal, even to him. We have to remember that Psellos was not without humour himself, and could write works in praise of a flea, louse and bedbug, as well as a discourse 'To his students who did not come to the School because it was raining' (Sathas 1872: 5.527–31; Kyriakis 1975; cf. Dennis 2003). Furthermore, he was not without experience of imperial humorists: he recounts three jokes, supposedly the *ipsissima verba*, of Zoe's uncle, Basil II 'the Bulgarslayer', and tells us of the loud laugh which convulsed the whole of his body: ὁ δὲ γέλως αὐτῷ καγχασμὸν εἶχε καὶ τῷ παντὶ συνεβράσσετο σώματι (*Chronographia* 1.37; R 1.23; S 49; Garland 1999b). The tradition at court was that Basil had been something of a wit, and a corpus of his sayings was obviously preserved: when Isaac I Komnenos was on the point of abdication in 1059, 34 years after Basil's death, he entertained his entourage – it is not clear whether Isaac's wife and daughter were present – with some of Basil's sayings, 'in a rather provincial dialect, cracking jokes more than was his wont, and kept us till evening with stories of the old times, recalling all the witty sayings of Romanos's son, the Emperor Basil the Great' (*Chronographia* 7.76; R 2.130; S 323). Like her third husband, Constantine, Zoe's second husband Michael IV had a sense of humour and organised pleasures for his wife, being considered by Psellos a master of the witty retort (4.7, 9 cf. 25; R 1.56–7, 68; S 90, 102). If Zoe and Theodora had 'laughter-loving habits' and a relish for the entertainment which Constantine Monomachos took care to provide for them (6.49; R 1.141), these tastes may well have been inherited from the great Basil Bulgaroktonos and only confirm the truth of this unexpected vignette into imperial amusement. It is even possible that Anna Komnene's criticism of the depravity of Monomachos's court, particularly the women's quarters (*Alexiad* 3.8.2; Leib 1.125; Sewter 120), concerns not only the silly love intrigues which had had taken place there, but the vulgar jollity as well.

In short then, empresses – and empresses in their own right, we should note, who could certainly chose their own entertainments – are shown as prepared not only to tolerate, but actually to commission and reward performances of this sort in their private apartments. It is particularly significant that the performance was specifically gendered, dealing with pregnancy and childbirth. Considering that neither had born a child (Theodora had never been married and had been a nun for some twenty years: Psellos 5.34; R 1.107; S 142), and that Zoe, early in the reign of her first husband, whom she married when she was fifty or so years of age, had passionately wanted an heir (Psellos 3.5; R 1.34; S 65), the subject might seem to have been a sensitive one. Boilas must have been aware of the imperial ladies' potential response before venturing on so risky an enactment, and the buffoonery as described must therefore have been to

their specific taste. When we consider that Zoe was given to the indiscriminate blinding of those who offended her (Psellos 6.157; R 2.49; S 238–9), it was especially important for a humorist to get the tone of the humour exactly right. Courtiers who fell down as if struck by lightning at the unexpected sight of Zoe (presumably overcome by her overwhelming beauty) would be rewarded with chains of gold, though overacting one's effusions of gratitude meant the flatterer was put in chains of iron instead – she was clearly a discerning critic where such dramatic performances were concerned (Psellos 6.157; R 2.48; S 238).

Even more important evidence for amusement instigated by and for ladies of the imperial family is the entertainment which was orchestrated by Alexios III in 1199/1200 to celebrate the second marriages of two of his daughters, Irene and Anna, to scions of the Byzantine nobility (Alexios Palaiologos and Theodore Laskaris). Palaiologos was awarded the title 'despot' on the occasion of his marriage, and his wife Irene was crowned as empress; they were designated as heirs to the throne. Choniates is very scathing of the infantile nature of the proceedings (τὰ μειρακιῶδη ταῦτα ἄθροματα). This was a private entertainment as Alexios III did not feel like bothering with the usual races in the hippodrome, though his sons-in-law elect, and presumably the princesses too, wanted a fitting entertainment to celebrate their marriage. The spectacle, therefore, took place in a specially improvised 'theatre' in a courtyard of the Blachernai palace, and we are explicitly told that the empress Euphrosyne and her daughters, the new brides, were present. Had the entertainment taken place in the traditional venue of the hippodrome, they would not have been present though the empress had, by tradition, been permitted to view the entertainment from the balcony of St Stephen in Daphne, one of the palace churches.

This private entertainment was restricted to the emperor and empress, their closest relations and selected, trustworthy attendants (Choniates 509), the rest of the retinues being excluded: Choniates himself, as *logothetes ton sekreton*, or co-ordinator of the imperial administration, may well have been one of those present. It consisted of chariot races, organ music and athletics put on by boys of good family (who had just grown their first beards). The master of ceremonies was a high-ranking court eunuch who 'administered the highest offices' and who enacted the part which would normally have been taken by the city prefect. In this case, his role was to cavort around dressed as a hobbyhorse, in wickerwork covered with a horsecloth adorned with figures and golden thread. Wearing a round silver head-dress, he was also in charge of starting each of the athletics races in the following way: 'a certain noble youth, notable for the lofty rank he held, stood behind the eunuch and, whenever the latter bent over and gave the signal for the race to begin, would kick him so hard with the flat of his foot on the buttocks

that the noise could be heard everywhere' (Choniates 508–9; Magoulias 280–1).

To the modern reader, this must seem an undignified, not to say crass, form of humour, though similar amusements were apparently enjoyed by Alexios's nephew, the young emperor Alexios IV Angelos (r. 1203–1204), who in the months before the fall of Constantinople was accused by his father Isaac of being given to the worst habits. These included keeping company 'with depraved men whom he smote on the buttocks and was struck by them in return', humour which seems to have appealed to Byzantines of this period (Choniates, 557, cf. 149). Cutler notes a possible connection with the bare buttocks – and spankings – which can appear to comic effect on Byzantine boxes, presumably under the influence of Byzantine 'theatre' or slapstick (Cutler 1984/85: esp. 45). Art here reflects performance humour. In a similar context, Henry Maguire has noted that pagan art (monstrous creations, centaurs, cupids, naked warriors and the like) shocked the Byzantines and made them laugh (Maguire 1999: 203–4). Profane art performed the function of an anti-culture, or safety-valve: the ridiculous had a liberating function. If the humour appears basic, we must remember that the standard works in the Byzantine education curriculum included Aristophanes's *Plutos*, *Clouds* and *Frogs* (plus occasionally the *Knights*) (Wilson 1983: 251–2). Anyone who had studied these plays in depth as literary texts would have no difficulty in relating to the physical humiliation and slapstick described above.

What is significant in the episode described by Choniates is the exclusive nature of the audience and the rank of the participants involved, especially the status of the eunuch, who was exceedingly wealthy and at the top of the court hierarchy. He was made to perform buffoonery which would normally have been the role of a professional mime or jester. The form of entertainment in itself was not uncommon at the court, or in the public 'theatre' or street carnivals, but here it becomes especially amusing by the fact that it is acted by a high-ranking eunuch and aristocratic youths of noble background. This is presumably one of the reasons why only the immediate members of the imperial family are allowed as spectators. At the same time, the private nature of the spectacle meant that the empress and her daughters (and their most trusted ladies) could be present. Euphrosyne was no shrinking violet. A few years earlier in 1196 her dominant personality became too overpowering and she was accused of adultery – probably as a pretext for removing her from power – though she was recalled from exile after several months. In an ingenious move, when the populace wanted to satirise her passion for falconry and sorcery (she mutilated the statues in the hippodrome for that purpose by cutting off the snout of the Kalydonian boar, planned the flogging of the statue of Herakles and removed limbs and

heads from other statuary), they trained talking birds to repeat 'set a fair price, you whore' in the streets and cross-roads of the capital (Choniates, 520). She was considered to overstep traditional gender boundaries in abrogating power to herself (see, for example Choniates 460–1, 489; Garland 1999a: 210–24) so she probably had a seminal role in orchestrating an entertainment which designated her daughter and son-in-law as heirs to the throne and which was intended for her own amusement and self-gratification and that of her immediate retinue. Moreover, since the spectacle was specifically insisted on by the newly-weds to celebrate their marriages, when the emperor Alexios was too apathetic to put on the customary amusements at the hippodrome, it must have been the form of humour that appealed to and was considered suitable for the relatively mature imperial brides. Both girls had been born in the early 1170s and hence were in their late twenties at this point. Interestingly, this entertainment involved a voyeuristic enactment of social superiority and role reversal, entrenched within the standard framework of buffoonery and comic play-acting.

The Ptochoprodromic poems

A further genre of entertainment at court which might profitably be considered here is the collection of texts known as the *Ptochoprodromic poems*, written, perhaps by Theodore Prodromos himself, in the guise of begging poems, but with a clear sub-text as entertainment. Whether or not they were recited or enacted before the court is a much-debated question. But bearing in mind that even letters were read aloud to a 'theatron' or court circle,³ it seems more than likely that they were specifically intended for performance at court. Certainly they were intended for oral delivery: the narrator asks John II to listen to what he has to write (ἀκουσον ἄπερ ὁ τάλας γράφω: 1.14). And if they were intended for delivery at court in the reigns of John and Manuel Komnenos, it would appear probable that they were performed to a mixed audience, despite the overt sexual innuendo of the broomstick scene in poem 1 or the homosexual connotations of poem 3 (Alexiou 1999: esp. 99–100, 102–3), as well as the extremely misogynistic humour in which the narrator is humiliated on numerous occasions by his wife and other dominant women.

The Ptochoprodromic poems are narrated from various contradictory stances – the narrator is a downtrodden husband, a poverty-stricken priest with a numerous family, a much put-upon monk Ilarion, and an unemployed

³ In 7 of the 68 letters in his correspondence (*Letters* 9, 24, 27, 32, 34, 44, 61) Manuel II Palaiologos compliments his correspondents on the applause their letters received when read out at court: *The Letters of Manuel II Palaeologus*, ed. and tr. G. T. Dennis (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1977).

scholar with a cupboard filled not with food but with useless papers – and the assumption of poverty in all cases, particularly focussing on the narrator's hunger, clearly allows the poet to play on a specific type of humorous situation in which he attempts to entertain by poking fun at his own series of predicaments (καὶν φαίνωμαι... γελῶν ὁμοῦ καὶ παίζων: 1.15). Despite the fictional constructions of identity within these poems, they provide valuable details of life in twelfth-century Constantinople (see Oikonomides 1990; Bouras 1982). In the first Ptochoprodromic poem the wife is supposedly a 'Matzoukina', a member of a well-known bureaucratic family (1.70; Oikonomides 1996b), married to a working-class husband. Disdainful of her lowly marriage, she insults her husband and complains about his background and the decrepit state of their house (which was apparently part of her dowry). With a total lack of concern for his well-being, she also invariably keeps him locked out of the larder. The reader is reminded of continual contemporary injunctions to husbands to clear the gutters and mow the lawn: 'the marble's disappeared and the floor has fallen in; the roof-tiles have become loose, and the roof has rotted; the walls are crumbling and the garden has dried up...' while the husband has never done so much as to buy a nail to help with repairs (1.75–87). When he arrives home his wife loads him with recriminations as to how hard she works for the family (indeed, she appears not only to have contributed most of its assets but also to possess basement workshops for making cloth for sale in the market as well as for use in the home),⁴ and locks herself in her bedroom. The narrator finally manages to sneak a meal by stealing the house keys and getting into the pantry when one of his children has a serious fall off the house roof. On the following day he disguises himself as a Slav beggar and begs a meal, whereupon his wife (who does not recognise him) invites him in and gives him a bowl of soup with some good pieces of meat in it. The poem's purported message is that he will die from this ill-treatment unless the emperor, John II, lends him a helping hand. The tone of the humour is exemplified by the following extract from the introduction:

Although I seem, lord [John II Komnenos], to laugh and play at once,
I am oppressed by endless grief and burdensome affliction,
By grave indisposition, and suffering – yes suffering!
Hearing of suffering, do not suppose I have a rupture,

⁴ Laiou 1992a: 185–93. It is tempting here to consider the provincial status of Danielis, the Peloponnesian widow in control of some 80 estates, thousands of slaves (including eunuchs and female embroiderers) and immense amounts of precious textiles, who was given the title of 'basileometer' by Basil I; she may, however, have been of Slav extraction and her holdings accumulated before Byzantine rule was reimposed: Theophanes Continuatus 227–8, 317–8; Skylitzes 112–3; Harvey 1989: 32, 235. See also Neville's paper on women's economic independence in this volume.

or any of the graver, inward ills,
 it's no eyesores, plain to see, nor shivering fever either,
 no heartburn, nor inflammation of the lung,
 nor gut-rotting shit-face, no dropsy, nor bronchial ills.
 No, I have a warring wife, whose tongue wags on and on,
 pugnaciously parading parapets and predictions,
 redundantly recounting me the rightness of her cause.
 And I will make manifest this woman's spitefulness,
 yet, lord, I fear those more brazen fellows,
 lest they should hear me, and go to my home
 and write reports about me unexpectedly.
 I would far rather, lord, they buried me alive,
 and put me in the earth, and dug me into it,
 than she should learn of what has just been written.
 (*Ptochoprodromika* 1.15–32; trans. Alexiou 1986: 36; 1999: 93)

It is not too simplistic to state that most women met with in the Ptochoprodromic poems (and women are frequent *dramatis personae*) either ignore the narrator and treat him with disdain, or refuse to give him the food he is begging for – often with obscene connotations thrown in for good measure. In the fourth poem (4.227–57), addressed to the Emperor Manuel, the narrator, on this occasion a poor scholar who wishes that he worked at a manual trade which would enable him to buy food, encounters various retail saleswomen. After spending all day in the streets with nothing to eat or drink, he notices a baker's wife chewing on the end of a loaf of some 'fine white (semolina-flour) bread'. When he asks for a slice she ignores him (4.99–108 = Eidencier 3.167–75). He then follows his nose to a butcher's, where 'some fine pieces of meat were roasting on the fire'. After he has flattered the butcher's wife, she invites him to sit down and promises him a meal, which, when placed in front of him, turns out to be belly-meat stuffed with excrement (σκατωτὴ λαπάραν). She then proceeds to throw it into his face (4.227–57 = Eidencier 133–5). The humour of the poems is greatly intensified by the obscene connotations of the foods mentioned (Alexiou 1986: 16–20): the narrator has a fancy for the butcher's wife's 'breast-meat' and 'belly-meat', and scatophagy, from Aristophanes's plays on, had been connected with homosexual practices (*Knights* 295; Henderson 1975: 192–3). These retail saleswomen bear a strong affinity to the portrayal of the masterful wife, the 'Matzoukina' of the first Ptochoprodromic poem, whose dominance is based on her higher birth (like Strepsiades's 'aristocratic' wife in *Clouds*) and her important economic role within the household – the stereotype of the shrewish and nagging wife. When read or performed – no doubt with suitable facial expressions, intonation and gestures – the court audience of either gender would have laughed at the author/narrator in his self-denigration and humiliation, as well as recognising the stereotypical role

reversal between the sexes which may not have been entirely untypical of certain 'real-life' Byzantine relationships.

Conclusion

In a discussion of imperial women and their perception of the humorous we need to pose the following questions: who commissions or instigates the humour and sets the parameters for what is considered humorous? Who transmits humour to whom? And if humour is the 'key' to a specific culture, what can we deduce about Byzantine society and the place of women within it?

Laughter is a social practice with its own rituals, 'theatre' and actors: typically in any joking situation there is one who laughs, one who causes the laughter, and one who is laughed at (Bergson 1935), though the narrator can in certain circumstances also be the target, as in the Ptochoprodromic poems. On other occasions, like Chalivoures's joke against Isaac Angelos and his female entourage, and, arguably, Boilas's portrayal of the *accouchements* of the empresses Zoe and Theodora, the women can be both target and audience.

Firstly we can state categorically, that, in contradiction of Bakhtin's theory of the popular culture of laughter, verbal and non-verbal humour were enjoyed by the elite, women and men, as well as by the populace at large. Moreover, the 'tone' of the humour remains relatively constant. After all in the science of joking, status can outrank propriety: it is possible and acceptable for imperial women, when not restricted by their menfolk, to transgress social norms of decorum and enjoy 'low' humour. Indeed, in Byzantium humour does not become more refined with social class: there is little or no shift to wit and verbal humour when we look at the entertainment available at the imperial palace. We are forced to note the element of buffoonery inherent at court in amusements specifically designed for empresses like Zoe and Theodora. The first was arrogant, ruthless, and fully aware of her standing as the representative of the great Macedonian dynasty, and the second later became a good and efficient ruler in her own right. Both appreciated what can only be titled as buffoonery.

In many cases, women, whether in the city streets or at court, participate in humour and entertainment essentially devised for the amusement of and enacted by men. This is only to be expected: after all, it would be unlikely for male authors to record the humour of all-women gatherings. Evidence for the perceptions of learned women is provided by Kassia's 261 lines of *gnomai* and epigrams, which, if written for the education of her nuns, rather than for more general circulation, are completely gynaikecentric – both written by and for women. In the case of Zoe and Theodora's entertainment in the *gynaikonitis*, too, the humour as described by Psellos is arguably

gynaikocentric – performed by a man, it is true, but specifically devised for the amusement of empresses and their ladies, not for a mixed audience, though ministers and other courtiers may have been present by invitation. In the same way, the entertainment for Alexios Angelos's two daughters was at least planned with imperial women of different ages and members of their retinues in mind as spectators.

Women in Byzantium at all social levels enjoyed humour, just like men. At court they appreciated the humour of jesters and buffoonery at court, and in the streets they participated in the mockery and humiliation which were part of the *diapompeuseis* of criminals and rebels (see Garland elsewhere in this volume). When they are shown as the initiators of humour, they are depicted as abusive and outspoken; and as the audience they had no objection on occasion to the joke being turned against themselves. Both genders shared a common appreciation of the humorous. But in addition it could be suggested that women of the imperial family, and perhaps, by implication, the educated and powerful women of the aristocracy also, had the power to establish the parameters for their own amusement. There is evidence that, rather than just accepting conventional performances, they may have commissioned their own gendered humour, and engaged jesters on their own terms. Laughter, as a non-verbal means of communication can be a valuable affirmation of group identity, particularly in groups who generally inhabit their own separate physical space or who are restrained by strict rules of conduct and deportment. It is possible that here we have a window into the separate world of the *gynaikonitis* and its manifestations of gendered humour.

In Byzantium comic thresholds and registers remain relatively constant whether women are a significant part of the audience or not: the imperial court enjoyed the sight of high-ranking officials being ritually humiliated (ie, kicked while assuming an embarrassing posture); incongruity of clothing and accessories; the inversionary humour of court jesters, in which a fool ridicules those in power; and the practical jokes and physical humiliation which were so popular a source of entertainment in such a competitive society as Byzantium.

It is clear that women themselves acted as participants in Byzantine humour – as creators, instigators and patrons of the humorous – or responded as the audience to situational humour: in other words, they were active participants rather than just passive targets. Certainly, whatever their social level, they had the freedom to respond to the humour inherent in their environment – abuse, jokes, personal humiliation of others, carnivalesque inversion of roles, buffoonery and slapstick – and there is abundant evidence that, given the opportunity, they responded with great enthusiasm.



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